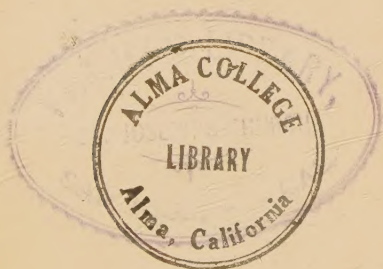




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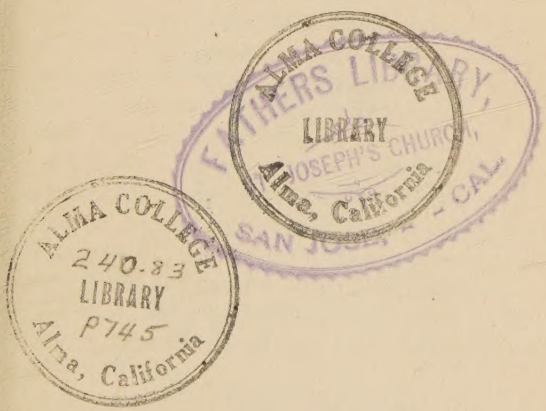


FACING LIFE

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MEDITATIONS FOR YOUNG MEN
BY RAOUL PLUS, S.J.

Translation approved by the Author



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PREFACE

OUR hopes for the future lie with the younger generation. While it is true that among the young men of to-day there are many who think of nothing beyond their own little affairs and amusements, on the other hand there are many, thank God, who entertain great dreams for the future, who are filled with the laudable desire and ambition of becoming saints themselves, and of sanctifying their fellow-men. It is for these that my little book is written.

Holiness cannot be attained without the interior life, and the interior life is impossible without prayer and meditation. The manifold pleasures of this world will lose their attraction only if we are united with God, and union with God is to be acquired only by communing with him in the silence of our own hearts—in short, by meditation.

Meditation is not for the cloister alone, just as holiness is not for monks only. I venture, therefore, young men in the world, to make this modest demand upon your time: a quarter of an hour daily, to be spent in heart-to-heart converse with God; a quarter of an hour's meditation every morning; fifteen minutes devoted, not to reading prayers out of a book, but to *personal* prayer—

prayer that wells up from your own heart, inspired, if you will, by some of the thoughts suggested in the following pages, but prayer that is really your own.*

God grant that these pages may be of some assistance to those who sincerely seek union with God.

* A simple method of meditation is suggested below, p. vii.

SOME PRELIMINARY WORDS OF ADVICE

I. Try to meditate without needing to use the thoughts of others. With your mind, with your faith, with your heart, surely you have more than enough to enable you to spend a profitable quarter of an hour with God.

II. If you find it necessary to use the thoughts of others in order to fix your attention—as in the case of persistent distractions—then do so; but only just so far as it is required in order to bring your own personal prayer into play. For the moment, your faith and your actual thoughts are out of touch with each other. When you want to set the water flowing from a pump, you pour a little water into it to start it, meanwhile working the handle. Do the same in your meditation. Instil a few thoughts into your mind, not many, but just enough to make you reflect. When once reflection has begun, when once your own thoughts have begun to well up from the depths of your soul, there is no need to continue reading. Pay yourself the compliment of using your own resources first; and use those of others only in order to make the most of your own.

III. If you find that your soul is quite irresponsible, then use the following method.

First of all:

1. Adore God present within you.
2. Humble yourself before God, to whom you are speaking.

Next, *read* slowly, trying to understand and to appreciate what you are reading, asking yourself:

1. What does this passage mean ?
2. What conclusion am I to draw from it ?
3. What have I done in this matter ?
4. What am I going to do ?

After reflection:

1. Thank God for the lights vouchsafed to you.
2. Offer to him the resolutions you have made.
3. Ask for grace to keep them.

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FACING LIFE

I

OUR BAPTISMAL HERITAGE

I. THE STATE OF GRACE

MY first question is a strange one. Are you alive? Of course you are alive. It would be strange indeed if this book were to fall into the hands of a dead man. But you know what I mean. I am speaking of the only life that counts, the Divine Life, the Divine Life in you. Have you this Life? In other words, are you in the state of grace?

“If I am not,” answers Jeanne d’Arc, “God make me so; if I am, God keep me so.” I do not like to admit the first supposition, that you, a young man of twenty, are in the state of mortal sin. But, were it true, you know what you have to do, so as not to remain for a moment longer in this state. Make an act of contrition from the bottom of your heart, and promise to go to confession. Then, as soon as you can, go to the priest, and you are *alive* once again.

“If I am in the state of grace, God keep me so.” It is not easy, I know. Someone has said that the state of grace is the state of heroism.

But faith teaches that at every moment, even in the throes of temptation, I have always the grace I need to resist, to remain faithful, unharmed, alive.

But for this, to obtain this grace, I must pray. It is God that gives victory, especially supernatural victory.

My God, my Mother, Mary Immaculate, I have this life within me. Grant that I may keep it.

2. "DEPART, UNCLEAN SPIRIT"

I came into this world burdened with original sin. I was under the thralldom of the devil; in this sense, at least, that I was without sanctifying grace, deprived of that gift by virtue of which the whole Trinity dwells within my soul, sanctifying me with a special, loving presence.

To wrest from the devil his rights over me, to reinstate me in my divine privileges, to restore my supernatural life—this is the effect of the Sacrament of Baptism. By this sacrament God restores to me the incomparable gift which he had given to Adam over and above what was due to his nature, that gift whereby God himself dwells within me, as long as I am without grave sin.

On the day of my baptism the priest, by virtue of the power vested in him as the minister of Christ, pronounced those stupendous words, those words of supreme authority, of absolute power: "Go forth from him, unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost." And then by virtue of the sacramental rite, "I baptize thee,

etc.," the wonderful change came about; Satan lost his power over me, and the Holy Ghost (indeed, the whole Trinity) made his triumphant entry into my soul.

At this moment, if I am in the state of grace, God lives within me.

3. THE BEARER OF GOD

One day, in the Catacombs, a young Christian was asked whether he would have the courage to go and take the Eucharist to a dying man. It would mean going out into the open, crossing the pagan city, and eventually exposing himself to the danger of capture. Tarcisius undertook the duty, received the pyx containing the Bread of Life, and set out on his errand.

At a certain point he was hailed by some of his comrades, who were at play. "Come with us," they said. "In a moment," replied Tarcisius; "I cannot come now." They insist, but in vain. "Why? What is the matter?" they ask; "are you the bearer of something?" The pagans crowd round him. They stone him.

I, too, am the bearer of God. The presence of the Holy Ghost (and of the whole Trinity) within me is no less *real* than the presence of the sacred Humanity in the Eucharist. They differ in so far as the one is a spiritual, the other a bodily presence; but the one is as real as the other. I am inconsistent, therefore, if I worship Christ really present in the Eucharist, and neglect God, really present in my soul by baptism.

God, then, is present within me. I will respect this presence, by avoiding mortal sin, which is nothing less than a dread reversal of that sentence uttered at my baptism: "Go forth from me, Holy Ghost, and come into me again, unclean spirit." I will honour this presence. Before him who is really present in the Eucharist a lamp is always burning. If not always, at least from time to time, let me remember that I am the bearer of God, a living tabernacle.

4. THE LEGEND OF S CHRISTOPHER

Christopher was in charge of the ferry over a certain river. One winter's day, when the river was very swollen, a child came and asked to be carried across. The ferry-man lifted the child on his shoulder and started to cross the stream. At first the weight seemed insignificant. But by the time they were half-way across, Christopher found his burden so heavy that he said to the child: "You are a heavy weight to carry." The child was the Son of God.

By virtue of my baptism I am the bearer of God. *Noblesse oblige*. It is a high office, and it brings with it a weighty responsibility. Just see the recollection and the humble joy with which the priest carries the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, or in procession on the feast of Corpus Christi. The presence of God in my soul by baptism is not the same, but it is no less real.

Am I sufficiently proud of this presence?

Am I sufficiently humble? The only reason

why I am vain is because I do not appreciate my true dignity.

Am I recollected enough? I am a living tabernacle. Do I appreciate at its true value the treasure that I bear within me? If I did, I should not be so inconstant and distracted in my prayers.

Am I radiant with this presence? Just as the monstrance with its golden rays is the joyous symbol of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, so my joyous demeanour should give evidence of God's presence within me.

Let me consider my responsibilities. I, too, am a Christopher. I am the bearer of God.

5. THE SPIRIT OF RECOLLECTION

An African chief who had lost two of his sons in battle wished to forget his sorrow. He therefore commanded two of his slaves, who were in constant attendance upon him, to beat drums, to shake baskets of shells, to sound gongs and to shout, whenever they saw their master looking thoughtful.

It would be a good thing for us to remind ourselves sometimes of the object of our life on earth. Are we here to stay, or are we pilgrims here? We never think of this. We do not need to pay slaves to provide us with the distraction of drums, gongs, and shouting. My daily life with its hurry and turmoil is engrossing enough to leave no time for thinking of the only thing that is essential—my baptismal heritage,

my divine destiny. I have no room in my life for anything but what is secondary. "Seek ye first of all the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." With me it is just the opposite. "All these things" demand the whole of my attention.

"We have no time for ourselves," says a famous writer,* "because we are so busy with other things. If we were to subtract from our lives the time given to sleep—death's twin brother—and to extraneous matters, the time we do not use, the time we lose and the time we fritter away, how much would be left? I think that most of our thoughts, our occupations, our feelings, have but the unavowed purpose of distracting us with frivolous things, so as to cheat us of a part of the short life that leads us to the tomb."

6. SOLITUDE.

Solitude is the dwelling-place of the strong. Our silence is the measure of our activity. Good makes no noise, and noise does no good. Silence has ever been the characteristic of great saints. It is obligatory in the cloister; it should be so wherever fruitful activity is desired.

In honour of the armistice and the unknown soldier, we are asked to keep silence for a few minutes. This is the silence that *follows* victory. But really it is silence that *gives* victory. To change the whole world, Scripture asks of us, not a great conqueror, not a senate of lawgivers,

* Henri Bordeaux.

not some new project—simply half-an-hour's silence. Is that all? But what proportion is there between a radical change in the whole world and half-an-hour's silence? There is proportion between the two. The reason why man does not change is that he does not reflect. If he reflected, he would not remain for a moment in his present state. The prodigal son did not reflect until he was reduced to the husks. When he saw himself sharing the food of the swine, then he began to think. The result was immediate. "I will rise and go to my father." He had had enough; he would go to his father; he could bear his disgrace no longer. The world is what it is, and remains what it is because it does not know the meaning of solitude. "There is none that thinketh in his heart." Our life at the present day is spent in the midst of a noisy jostling crowd of people who are too busy to give a moment to reflection.

Let me try to secure a few minutes of interior solitude every day. Far from the noise of the world I will draw near to God in thoughtful silence. I will make a prolonged, fervent act of faith in his presence within me by baptism.

7. REFLECTION ON ETERNITY

Of what shall we think throughout eternity? Of God. And yet we hardly ever think of him now. We hardly ever think of God, who by his presence in us on earth creates our life of grace, by his glorious presence in Heaven gives

us our life of glory. How many of us ever reflect that we are *divine*, that by our baptism we are partakers of the divine nature, sons of God, bearers of God? Look at the crowds of people going into the Tube, or jostling each other at the doors of lecture-halls and theatres. How many of them think of these things?

People do not *think*. People never, or hardly ever, reflect on the things that count. Read these striking words, written by a Catholic who was killed during the war: "Have you ever noticed the joy and thankfulness with which you are greeted if you interrupt a child who is saying his prayers, or a woman who is reading a book, in fact anyone who is alone and has nothing to do? They are like reeds which have been given the faculty of thought, but would rather be without it; they would have preferred to be flutes!

"A minute of solitude, of communion with self! The very idea is death to these people. And it is true, to a certain extent; it would mean death to something in them—death to that foolish, frivolous, empty-headed, thoughtless habit of life, which they have formed since the first moment in which they came to the use of reason. To meditate would mean contemplating in all its awful splendour the eternal, poignant problem of man's greatness—and man's helplessness. Nothing so imprudent for these people! They refuse to do it. Made by nature to soar, they are birds only in the littleness of their brains; they have clipped their wings and refuse to fly; they prefer to crawl.

“We have about fifty or sixty years of conscious life: not a long time in which to become a man; a very long time in which to remain a child. These people do their best. They follow their path, rub elbows with beauty without seeing it, with sorrow without embracing it. They walk along the road to death blindfolded. The day will come when the bandage will be removed from their eyes. Their long childish effort will have its reward. They will understand what is the reward of life—just after they have lost it.”

8. THE WHITE ROBE OF BAPTISM

Before I was born my mother prepared with loving care everything that would be needed for my early days; amongst other things a veil of white muslin, which the priest would use at the end of the ceremony of baptism. He signed me with the sign of the Cross, saying, as he poured the water: “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Then taking one end of the veil, he said: “Receive this white garment, and see thou carry it without stain before the judgement-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

At my first communion I wore white again—a white armlet. The meaning was the same; and I understood it better then. It meant purity. It meant that I was to produce that white robe unblemished before the judgement-seat of God—the white robe of my baptism and

of my first communion. I was to avoid mortal sin as the only real evil there is.

Let me do more than this. Let me have a special reverence for *the fair virtue*. I will avoid like the plague every thought, look, desire, conversation, or book that might soil the purity of my senses, of my imagination, of my heart. I will have nothing to do with those phrases of double meaning, those stories of doubtful propriety, those dangerous companions. I will delight in chastity; keep my eyes from impurity, my senses from contamination, my heart from corruption.

Mother most pure, help me to keep most pure.

9. "O ME, AGNELLO, HOW THOU CHANGEST"

Until that moment, I was innocent. The course of my life had been that of a broad, placid river reflecting the wide expanse of heaven. Then came the occasion of sin. At first there was a feeling of astonishment; then of disgust. Slily, unexpectedly, it came again. I liked it, and at the same time I hated it. The temptation came to stay. There was no question as yet of yielding to it; but gradually I became less careful; I devoted less time to my prayers. Doubts against faith began to arise, and the anchor of hope began to slip. "You will never remain faithful until the end. One day or another, you must give way." At length, perhaps, I fell. Then came the collapse, the gradual, and finally the complete demoralization.

The author of the Divine Comedy gives a thrilling description of this transformation of a soul:

Behold ! a serpent with six feet darts forth
In front of one, and fastens wholly on him.—
Ivy was never fastened by its barbs
Unto a tree so, as this horrible reptile
Upon the other's limbs entwined its own.
Then they stuck close, as if of heated wax
They had been made, and intermixed their colour;
Nor one nor other seemed now what he was. . . .
The other two looked on, and each of them
Cried out: "O me, Agnello, how thou changest!"*

What is my own state? Have I been always pure? Or have I put myself within reach of those slimy coils that fasten so tightly on their prey?

10. SPASMODIC CHRISTIANITY

By this I mean the Christian life which is made up of periods of sanctity alternating with periods of mortal sin. I fear that this describes the life of many Christians. You really want to remain true. A temptation comes. You resist it (at least, we hope so; sometimes, perhaps, you fall without making any effort); at last you fall into sin. Let us hope that at once you have the *will* to rise from sin, and that soon the Sacrament of Penance, received with true repentance, puts everything right once more. Sometimes even a good Catholic will let several days pass before going to confession. Suppose you were to die in that state. Moreover, in the state of mortal

* *Inf. c. 20, 50 seq.* (tr. Longfellow).

sin, what becomes of all your merits? It is an essential condition for "merit" to be in the state of grace. Therefore, during the whole time that you are in the state of sin, all your efforts are useless, of no avail for your heavenly reward. You are like a madman with pockets full of golden coins who takes them one by one and throws them into the river. If you are not alive, then your works are dead. What a mad waste!

When, on the day of my first communion, I promised sincerely to be faithful to Jesus Christ for ever, I did not mean by that to be faithful now and again. That were a faithless fidelity to promise! It is a sad irony to give the name of "the faithful" to many of those who call themselves Christians. I wonder how many of them, taking them all together, are in the state of grace—faithful, I mean, constantly, without grave lapses.

Resolution: not to be discouraged if I fall sometimes. I am weak. But at the same time, let me not exaggerate my weakness. Even granted the poor excuse of weakness, by God's mercy I have, now and at every moment, what I need to keep me true for ever in the future.

II. THE KISS OF JUDAS

"Every one has on his lips," says Mgr. Benson, "and one day may give, the kiss of Judas." It would be difficult to describe the drama of our lives in terms more vivid than these.

I am bearer of a treasure of unspeakable value,

—the life of God within me—and I bear it in a vessel that is but frail. Adam received gifts of three kinds: natural gifts (body and soul), supernatural gifts (the life of God in his soul), and, besides these, preternatural gifts (exemption from suffering, from death, and from the rebellion of unruly passions). It is this last point that interests us for the moment.

After the Fall, the natural gifts remained as they were before. The supernatural gifts were restored to us completely through the redemption of our Saviour. Only the preternatural gifts were not restored to us. Why not? I might answer: "because God so willed it." But there is a further explanation. In order to give us back our divine life, our Divine Lord chose to suffer and to die. More; he allowed himself even to be tempted; not indeed from within (that the perfection of his nature could not permit), but at least from without. And so we become divine—that is our privilege through the redemption; we remain frail—that is the consequence of original sin. Divine, yet frail. Hence the drama of our lives.

We must be prudent, therefore. A legend of Sparta tells of a young boy who, being in wrongful possession of a little fox, hid it next to his skin, and rather than betray himself, allowed his breast to be torn by the animal. I, too, am torn with the struggle against my evil passions. There is an unwelcome guest within me. I will always remember that he is there, watch him and keep him in check.

12. THE SCOURGE OF MEMORY

Perhaps the saddest words in the history of man are those words of David in the *Miserere* : " My sin is ever before me."

When a strong temptation is upon me, and my resolve falters before the fascinating lure of sin, the protest of my conscience is answered by an evil voice that whispers: " What is a sin after all ? It may mean a little remorse, nothing more. And what is that in comparison with the pleasure you will derive from this ?"

If I consent, shall I find that this voice spoke the truth, or not ? It was a lie. " After all," I shall say, " was the pleasure nothing more than this ? What is left in my hand ? A handful of ashes."

In my memory there remains that which is so consoling to the innocent, so cruel a scourge to the sinner, *remembrance*. " My sin is ever before me." If only for that reason, it is a dear price to pay for a pleasure that has already vanished, leaving nothing but bitterness behind it. What would I not give now, not to have sinned then ! It is of no use. All the remorse in the world cannot undo the past. It will be true for all eternity that on this day, at this moment I . . . that I did what I remember.

How ashamed I am ! *Miserere*. God, have mercy on me !

13. THE SCOURGE OF HABIT

Sin brings its own punishment, a double punishment. Whether I want it or not, sin leaves me its remembrance, and—a more cruel punishment still, and one that constitutes a greater danger—it leaves me with a certain inclination to repeat that sin. I hate it, and yet it rests its horrible weight upon my will.

One act is enough to make, if not a habit, at any rate, the beginnings of a habit. Surely I was already prone enough to evil through original sin. Must I, by falling into sin, infect myself, so to speak, with another original sin, a further propensity to evil? Did I find it so easy in the past to resist, that I can now light-heartedly set these shackles on my feet?

A habit is “second nature,” and it is much stronger than the former nature—so take heed. It is true that at every moment I have the grace I need in order to resist; but what a tragedy it is by my own fault to have made myself less likely to correspond to the grace which God always offers me!

14. REPENTANCE

“Has God any use for me, now that I have sinned?” I answer in these words, which I have seen somewhere: “A man steeped in crime is always an object of interest to God. He is an object for his mercy. He has a special place

among those whom the Son of God died to redeem."

The Master said: "I came not to save the just, but sinners." "I am come for the lost sheep of Israel." "There is more joy in heaven for one sinner that doth penance than for ninety-nine just that need not penance."

There is in virginal love something that is beyond price. But there is also in the love of the penitent a quality so rare, that our Lord could say: "There is more joy in heaven for one sinner that doth penance than for ninety-nine just that need not penance." There would seem, at first sight, to be something wrong with this arithmetic. But make an act of faith; for it is the word of our Master. Innocence unblemished is very beautiful. Innocence, generously and above all, definitively regained, stirs the heart with a deeper and warmer feeling.

Has God any use for you? Can you doubt it? It is what he expects, what he demands of you. And now you will devote yourself to his service with all the more fervour that now you have more to atone for, that now you understand better than before the terrible evil of sin.

I will look to the future. The past is past. I will begin a new life from to-day. All that I see in my past life is a reason for trying in the future to live up to my ideals, and to be generous without counting the cost.

15. PROFESSION OF FAITH

When you love a person, your one object is to do him honour. I owe it to *God*, then, to herald his glory throughout the world; to show, by an openly Christian life, that for me God is everything; if anyone in my presence mocks God or Christ or my religion, to show by my attitude, by my words, by professing my faith, that I will not tolerate it. If someone attacked my mother, should I be silent? Yet God is far more to me than my mother, much as I owe to her.

I owe it to *myself*. I am a man; that is, a rational being. It is only logical to profess openly what I believe. A man prides himself on his courage. Have I so poor an opinion of myself as to blush or be afraid because some one sneers at me? And what a poor sort of fellow it is sometimes that sneers!

I owe it to my *neighbour*. How many there are who are waiting only for my example, to practise their own religion openly and without fear! The majority of Christians are weak. I should relieve many a conscience, and encourage many a timid soul, if I boldly stated my views.

Resolution: to be always, everywhere, and openly, a Christian.

16. "WHO ART THOU?"

A colonel in Morocco once asked an interpreter to give him a description of the native chief with whom he was to engage in combat. "When

you see him," answered the interpreter, "you will say 'That is he.'"

Is there something in me which makes others recognize me immediately for what I am? Or can it be said of me: "You might know him for years, and yet never dream that he says his prayers or goes to communion?" Of course I must not put on airs. We want none of that foolish, affected piety. Let us have real energetic, enthusiastic devotion; no soft sentimentality, but pluck and resource. Religion is being attacked. Very well. Now I am going to attack in my turn; not out of any desire to be quarrelsome, but in order to do good, to correct prejudice, to throw light on some point of gospel-teaching. My campaign will be conducted with energy, but always with charity; on the other hand, without pity for idols, vain-glory, or empty and foolish accusations. I will preach especially by example. Words touch the heart, sometimes; example always carries conviction.

The old masters painted haloes around the heads of their saints, so that it was impossible for anyone looking at the picture to make a mistake. Let there be in me something corresponding to this.

17. MODERN PROGRESS

People are very much inclined to regard the industrial applications of modern inventions as the last word in civilization. This is far from being the case. What really needs to be changed is the heart of man. What is the use of this

powerful mechanism, if it is but to launch the destructive torpedo? Why solve the most abstruse problems of ballistics, if it is only to enable us to shoot huge projectiles ten miles into the air? Let us not confuse material civilization with moral progress.

Are men less selfish nowadays? Is there less favouritism in high places, less avarice among the rich, less envy in the hearts of the poor, less of that mad frenzy for pleasure in the hearts of all men?

It is a good thing, by all means, to promote material progress. But without Christ that progress is of little use, and, in some cases, harmful. Without Christ, thought advances but little, in fact hardly at all. Have there been any discoveries in philosophy—I mean discoveries which are worth while, discoveries which enable us to understand more of the fundamental problem of our destiny—since the time of Plato and Aristotle?

He alone does anything for civilization who makes the heart purer, brings heaven nearer, or raises the mind of man from the things of earth to things sublime.

18. ANNIVERSARY OF MY BAPTISM

S Vincent Ferrer had a Mass said every year of his life on the anniversary of his baptism. The Mass was said in the chapel at Valence where the black marble font was kept, in which he had been made a child of God.

It is a long time since I was baptized; and since then I have received many blessings from God. But do I realize the meaning of baptism? King Louis of France took the name of Louis of Poissy, after the place in which he received the Sacrament of Baptism and became a child of God. He preferred this name to the title of King.

I was baptized as a little child. Am I not still a little child in my understanding of baptism, in my appreciation of my baptismal titles and privileges? On that day, like Vincent Ferrer, from being a child of man I became a child of God; from being a child deprived of the supernatural—had I died before baptism, I should never have seen God face to face—I became possessed of grace in this life, and capable of glory after death; from being a child of wrath, I became incorporated into Christ my Saviour, a member of that Son, “in whom the Father has been well pleased.” On that day, God made me his temple, his living sanctuary; in me the whole Trinity made its home.

Compared with this, can anything count with me? The day of my baptism was the greatest day of my life.

19. “MY MINUTES ARE NUMBERED”

“My minutes are numbered. In heaven charity will increase no more, nor will my own glory, nor the glory I can render to Christ and to God. How precious is time!”*

* Cardinal Mercier.

For the just man, death is not the terrible thing that many imagine. Rightly understood, it is the last great joy of life, because by death what was temporal becomes everlasting, what was dark becomes light, what was invisible and unfelt becomes my eternal beatitude.

From the supernatural point of view, the only drawback about death in the eyes of the just man is that it sets a term to his period of merit; it cuts short his progress at a certain point, and at that point it will remain for all eternity. If during my life on earth I was niggardly in my efforts to sanctify my soul, my glory will be proportionate to my grace on earth. Heaven does not change the essence, but only the manner of the soul's activity. As my grace was, so will my glory be. By every good act done on earth I intensify that grace. In heaven I can work no more; there I can only enjoy the fruits of my labour.

Resolution : to gain on earth all the merit I can. The beauty of my life on earth is that every moment I can make myself more holy.

20. HALF-HEARTED SANCTITY

It was said of someone* in his youth that "he was always an inch too tall." He found it difficult to adapt himself, because he hated limits, and feared mediocrity. It was not a case of that childish instability that wants change simply for the sake of change, but a desire, which tor-

* Ernest Psichari.

mented him throughout his life, to raise himself to a higher level. "I feel," he wrote, "that I shall give God all that he asks of me." *All* is a great deal. How few there are that love and serve God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their strength. It is so easy to do things by halves: to be half-generous, half-virtuous. Try always to give of your best.

You sometimes hear people say: "As long as I get to heaven! If I get just inside the gates, I shall be happy." This is a mean spirit. It is not the Catholic spirit. It is the antithesis of what our Saviour asks of us: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Have nothing to do with these minimizers. Do not be one of those half-hearted saints, one of those who preach the doctrine of "as little as possible": "Anything is enough in the service of God. What does his glory, or his greater glory matter to me? As long as I save my soul, the rest does not count."

Resolution : to encourage my will to desire what God wants of me. God wants me to be a saint. I will begin to-day.

II

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

21. DIE AT YOUR POST

THERE is a monument at Verdun to the memory of some soldiers who were buried alive in a trench, just as they were about to make an attack. Their bodies were found standing in the attitude of readiness to "go over the top."

Let us die standing. The important thing is not so much to be victorious, as to remain standing, to fight to the bitter end. The only lost causes are those for which men have not been ready to lose their lives. God does not ask me to be a success. My failure may be one of the conditions of my ultimate salvation. I must, of course, do my very best to succeed, to overcome evil, and to fight against God's enemies. But the outcome I must leave in God's hands. What does it matter, if I must disappear without witnessing the final triumph? My devotion will be all the more meritorious, because without human reward it will be more unselfish. Our failures are the raw material out of which God fashions his ultimate triumph. He seems to find greater glory in our unsuccessful striving, than in allowing us to conquer without effort. Success would be ours in a moment, if he so willed it. One single sincere effort on our part, even though

ineffectual, has more value in his sight than the immediate triumph of his Church. Have patience.

Besides, the best way to make the enemy retreat is to remain standing at one's post. Nothing makes a greater impression on the enemy than unflinching courage. It is invincible. During the salvage operations on the *Ariane*, sunk in 1917, one of the divers, in the uncertain light of the depths of the sea, found himself confronted by a sailor standing there in full uniform, rifle in hand. Panic-stricken at the sight, he fainted, and it was only with great difficulty that he was revived. The sailor was a corpse. Let the enemy find me ever living and on the alert.

22. PERSONALITY

There is not one man in ten thousand who is really "somebody." Try as far as possible to think for yourself, to feel, to will, to act for yourself. There are so many that imitate, copy, reproduce; so few that discover, invent, create.

Try to develop your personality to its full extent; not out of vanity—that would be absurd—but in order to make the most of God's gifts, to utilize your own advantages to their utmost, to make your life yield the maximum output. Briefly, try to be "somebody."

When a man is young he develops eccentricities in the effort to be different from others; he tends to become odd. True originality does not consist in refusing to imitate others. In

fact it may consist precisely in imitating another. If the model is a good one—an artist or a saint—why not? Distinguish, then, between the originality which consists simply in being “different,” and that which consists in being “profound.” The former prides itself on imitating nobody, least of all the best models. That means folly. The latter involves penetrating more deeply than others into the heart of things. That means successful work.

23. WILL

“There are three ways of willing:

“Willing *at no cost*.

“Willing *at all costs*.

“Willing *because it costs*.

“This third way of willing is for the high-minded and the big-hearted.”*

Willing *at no cost*. If, by willing, you mean doing a thing that you do not want to do, that is really not willing at all; it is simply following the stream. To will in that way involves no courage whatever. Why is it that so many young people, when they are no longer under control, turn out so badly? There was a time when they willed nothing but what was good. Yes; but they willed it with no cost to themselves. Now they are in a different atmosphere, and their souls are changed. They are so much dross.

Willing *at all costs*. This is hard. But the difficulty does not deter from willing. In the

* Père de Ravignan.

early days of flying, as an aviator was making the tour of the European capitals, experts tried to dissuade him from taking the trip from Berlin to Warsaw, because of the thick fog and the intense cold. "It will be hard," they told him. "Do you think I am good only for easy work?" was the reply. That is the right spirit.

Willing because of the cost. There are some for whom difficulty is a stimulus and an encouragement. They are few. Be one of these. Throw yourself into the conflict (with yourself, and with God's enemies), not in spite of the danger, but because of it; not out of rash and foolish bravado, but out of pure pluck and courage, strong in the consciousness of your aim and the sublimity of your cause.

24. PERSEVERANCE

Harrison was a young carpenter in an English provincial town when, at the beginning of the last century, Parliament offered a prize of £20,000 for anyone who would invent a chronometer to indicate simultaneously true and mean time. Harrison said to himself: "I am going to win that prize." He laid down saw and plane, went to London, became a watch-maker, worked for forty years . . . and won the prize.

Tamerlane, a Mongolian chief, having suffered several defeats, called his council together, to discuss whether they should give up the struggle or carry it on. Suddenly he noticed an ant slowly climbing up his tent. Several times,

arrived at a certain point, it fell down again, but immediately began the ascent once more. Tamerlane hesitated no longer. He would follow the example of the ant.

Even though you do only a little, persevere. To learn how to *will*, and how to decide in great crises, there is no better way than *willing*—willing in small things.

25. RESISTANCE TO TEMPTATION

“When we come to know sin, no longer merely by hearsay, but by the traces of it that every man bears in himself, then we must either with a great effort pass the threshold of Christian manhood, or else succumb.”*

As a child, I often heard of temptation, but I did not know what it was. True, I knew what it was to be tempted to gluttony or laziness; but those were small matters. What I feel now is something deeper, and far more serious. Evil forces rise up within me like a great black cloud. The very thought of it makes me blush. What am I to do?

Until this moment I could remain a mere child; now it is my duty to be a *man*. Unless I make up my mind to fight manfully, I am lost. It is one thing to hear of temptation as a thing far-off and unreal that happens to others; it is quite another to feel oneself torn by passions, like the fox overtaken by the pack, obliged to stand at bay, or perish.

* Lacordaire.

I am now at that stage. My whole future depends on the fight that I make now; my future here, and my future hereafter.

What is my method of meeting temptation? *Vigilance and prayer* is the advice of our Lord. Do I watch and pray?

26. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIFLES

If I am waiting for "big things" in order to sanctify my soul, I shall probably wait for a long time. It is very likely that they will never come. If they do come, and find me unprepared, they might just as well have never been, for all the good that they will do me. Opportunity makes the thief; but the thief also must make his opportunity. I shall be strong in the big things of life, if I learn to be strong in the little things.

To be strong in little things is a very difficult matter. Anyone can make a great effort now and again. But one's whole life long, from morning till night, consistently to make a long series of little sacrifices; to keep constant guard over one's thoughts, to be whole-hearted in devotion, zealous in one's work, fervent in piety, punctual in rising in the morning and in fulfilling the other duties of the day—mere nothings, yet they count so much—this calls for a courage which amounts almost to heroism.

They are called little things. They are really great things, because they require a great soul; they are great, because nothing is little that you refuse to God. If S John at the foot of the cross

had refused our Lord a glass of water, would you think such a refusal nothing more than a slight discourtesy? What my master asks of me is often nothing more than a glass of water. Would it be a small thing to refuse it to him?

27. CONCENTRATION

Marshal Foch says that "if a man of ordinary ability concentrates all his faculties and energies upon one aim, as long as he works at it steadily and constantly, he must attain it."

Not everybody can be an "ace." If you are only a man of ordinary ability, you need not be discouraged. "Can I succeed?" You may even do great things. "How?" Simply by defining your purpose. A favourite saying with Marshal Foch was: "What is it exactly that you want to do?" Be quite clear in your mind as to what it is that you want to do.

The next thing is to adopt as far as possible the means that will effect your purpose. Do not dissipate your energy. Concentrate. Hold yourself in, so as to be able better to let yourself go. If something is really to the purpose, devote yourself to it untiringly, with all your energy, with all your resources. "How did I win my battles?" says the great Marshal again; "by reserving all my strength to devote it entirely to my work."

First, a clear perception of the aim; secondly, an intelligent disposition of the means. A third element is necessary to ensure success: strong

will-power. Work steadily. Victory is to the strong; to the man who can hold on for a quarter of an hour longer than his adversary.

Now you have the secret of winning any contest.

28. CORRESPONDENCE WITH GRACE

“No one knows what God would do with a soul, if that soul would leave itself in God’s hands.”*

Never oppose the slightest voluntary resistance to an inspiration of God, if you clearly recognize it to be such; if you see that it is in keeping with the duties of your state, with the sound principles of Christian perfection and with the advice of your director. To keep that rule is not merely to live the Christian life; it is perfection.

Many are heedless and do not hear the voice of God. Of those who hear it, many are cowardly and do not follow where God calls; or if they do follow, it is with reluctance, by fits and starts, and from afar off. True, it is beyond my strength to correspond perfectly with God’s grace. But try. Keep calm, and do not be impatient if you fall. Keep on trying. Why should you aspire to no more than a half-hearted sanctity. Oh! if I could only keep pace with God along the path of perfection. My strides are dwarfed beside his. But God condescends to my weakness, and adapts his pace to mine. But even then I do not follow him; I remain stationary. If I had always hearkened to God’s voice, I should be a saint by now.

* Père de Ravignan.

In future I promise constant fidelity, as far as my weakness allows. I will make every minute yield its maximum of "eternity."

29. TEPIDITY

"One step beyond mediocrity, and you are saved."* What a consoling thought! For a long time I had been stagnant. I was neither hot nor cold. I was tired of leading a good life; tolerant of occasions of sin; lazy in getting up in the morning; unguarded in what I read, and in looking about me; neglectful in my prayers and communions. I had not yet fallen headlong, but I was just on the verge.

And in addition, brooding over all this was the temptation that was more dangerous than all the rest put together, more dangerous because insidious: "You will never be anything more than middling. You, a saint! What are you thinking of?" I could not shake off this burden. I was like a tree over-laden with snow in winter, whose branches cannot wave in the wind, because they are weighed down and benumbed.

Then these words were whispered into my soul. The snow thawed; the branches stood erect once more, and waved in the grateful breeze that set the forest alive with movement. "One step beyond mediocrity, and you are saved."

I decided to take this step. I took it. I feel a new strength within me. I feel drawn towards the heights once more, towards the path of perfection.

* Ernest Psichari.

30. SACRIFICE

There is joy in sacrifice; an austere joy, it is true, but none the less real. The satisfaction of having done our duty and given proof of our love is the prize with which God rewards our efforts.

Every earthly pleasure leaves a void, a taste of ashes. Man is too great to be satisfied with the finite; he longs for the infinite. You may try to content his longings with the nothingness of earthly joys; you will never fill up the void of his desire.

To do without a thing gives satisfaction sometimes; to have a thing, never. God has willed that it should be so. If earth could give us heaven here below, we should never think of looking to the heaven above.

We are always crying for more. Nothing could better illustrate at the same time man's littleness, and man's greatness. To thirst for happiness is to be finite, a creature. To be insatiable in that thirst is man's torment, man's sublime privilege. A creature is as great as his desires.

At Chantilly in the cupola of the porch an angel is depicted hovering, draped in a mantle of light green. Around it radiates the word "*Spes*—hope." A life in which there is no hope is death,

31. COURAGE

It has been said that to lose money is to lose nothing; to lose honour is to lose much; to lose courage is to lose all.

Have I courage? Have I what is more than courage—the spirit of *aggression*? To resist attack is a good thing, whether it be an attack from without, against my honour as a Christian, or an attack from within, against my purity or my faith. Some can do no more than this; and of them no more can be asked. But to follow the enemy to his lair, to attack him, harass him without respite, this is the more difficult, or at any rate the more effectual course. If a plan is to be fruitful, it must be positive. Not to give way is merely negative. The plan of a brave and vigorous army is a positive one—to worry the enemy, pursue him, harass him, force him to surrender.

The spirit of aggression in the Christian life is nothing else than the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Let me see where I stand. Am I generous in conquering myself? Do I take the initiative in attacking?

32. SELF-CONQUEST

A certain great soldier,* who was also a great Christian, once in his life committed a sin of impurity. He was overcome with shame when he looked back upon this sin. The pleasure that one derives from impurity is but small when once it has been tasted. But he was not content with

* Ernest Psichari.

mere repining; that was for the past. The future was the important thing. That temptation, or others, might come again, and to meet them he must be strong. Hence he made the firm resolution: to "conquer himself by force."

I like that expression, and I make it my own. I prefer the word "conquer" to "overcome," because it sounds the note of optimism, of triumphal joy; and that is what I need if I am to throw myself into the thick of the fight. I must use force. I know myself, and I know that I need rough treatment. The same man used to say: "There is nothing that helps you better in your spiritual progress than to live on a handful of rice a day, with a little salt water. The best way to prepare your soul to receive God is to empty it of every earthly pleasure."

Resolution: to practise a certain austerity in my daily life, especially with regard to sleep, food, and general comfort; to decide what mortifications I am going to practise in future, in order to conquer self.

33. THE WILL TO SUCCEED

The following conversation is recorded in the history of the British Admiralty. Admiral Dupont was explaining to Admiral Farragut why he had failed to enter Charleston harbour with his fleet of iron-clads. Farragut heard him out, and then said: "There is another reason, Dupont."—"What is that?" "You did not *believe* you could do it."

If you are to be successful you must have faith in yourself. You must have the will to achieve your object. The best guarantee of success is the will to succeed. I do not mean merely the hope to succeed, but the *will* to succeed. Nor do I mean that nervous thrill which is the sign of feverish and restless impatience; but the will to succeed that is based upon wise reflection, a clear perception of the end to be attained, and the careful arrangement of the means to the end; that studies how it can best use present opportunities in order to obtain speedy and satisfactory results.

An American president, who was asked what was his coat of arms, remembering that he had once been a woodman, answered: "A pair of shirt-sleeves rolled up." And that reminds me of the story of Stephen Colonna, who, when he had been captured by his enemies, was asked: "Where is your fortress now?" "Here," he said, pointing to his heart.

Roll up your shirt-sleeves, be brave of heart, and your success is certain.

34. TENACITY

"It will not do simply to wait, as so many do, until Blücher arrives; in the meantime you must fight and persevere, as Wellington did."* At the end of the battle of Waterloo it seemed as though Napoleon must win. Blücher would

* Samuel Smiles: *Self-help*, a book containing many excellent hints on the formation of character.

never arrive in time; and the English line would give way. It was only Wellington's tenacity that gave Blücher his opportunity.

It is a very easy thing to rely on others and let them win your battles. But the intervention of others is only possible, or at any rate effectual, if you yourself have already done all you can.

In a play which represents the siege of Genoa in the days of Napoleon, the following scene occurs. An Austrian envoy enters the town, whose food-supply had been cut off. "Surrender," he says to Massena; "we know that you are at the end of your resources." "You are wrong," replies Massena; "we want for nothing. Who is hungry here?" Then turning to an old veteran; "Tell me frankly," he says, "are you hungry?" "No, sir," answers the veteran, and falls to the ground, fainting from starvation.

If I hold on as long as that, surely help will arrive.

35. HAVING ONE'S REVENGE

When General Desaix arrived on the battlefield at Marengo to find that the position was hopeless, he did not waste time in lamenting the fact. The battle was lost. Never mind. It was only three o'clock; before evening the situation would be saved, and the victory his.

I have fallen into sin. After all my promises, after my resolve to be strong, to resist at all costs, I have been beaten by the enemy. Well, what am I going to do? Whine and com-

plain? Or worse, be angry with myself? Or worse still, lose courage and think that I shall never succeed?

No. First, I will see exactly how matters stand. I will be sorry, but not surprised, nor angry. Then I will imitate General Desaix, who took out his watch and said: "I have lost this battle; but it is only three o'clock, and I have plenty of time to save the situation. I will begin now." That is the way of the strong man. Our life on earth, which is "all a warfare," does not consist in marching from victory to victory, invincibly. It is more a question of turning defeat into victory. Do your best not to fall. But if you do fall, rise to your feet, pull yourself together, and march ahead. There is always time to devote yourself entirely to God. For the man who wants to "have his revenge," it is never too late.

36. FAINT-HEARTEDNESS

When the coal-mines at Beaujonc near Liège were first being exploited, a mine was flooded. The foreman ordered the signal-bell to be rung, to recall the hundred and twenty-two miners who were down in the mine. The foreman and his son, however, refused to go up; they would go to the assistance of their comrades. For two days nineteen men sought to hew a way through the wall of hard rock, to escape the rising flood. On the third day the men gave it up. "Very well," cried the boy, seizing a pick, "if you are

going to cry like children, I must work like a man." In five days they were freed.

A seething flood threatens to engulf society. Some have run away from the danger. Others have had the devotion to remain on the scene of the disaster, doing their best to save others. On some days, perhaps, their courage fails them. The flood is rising; and the rock is very hard. It is the privilege of youth never to doubt, always to have hope to spare. Never allow yourself to breathe a word of doubt; never show despair. The future is yours if you make certain of it. Those miners were tired out, and would have given it up on the third day; had they done so, they were lost. It was at the call of youth that they took heart once more; and soon came deliverance.

Resolution : humbly, but firmly, to revive the failing courage of my neighbour.

37. LOSING CAUSES

"I am going; a victorious king has no further interest for me," said Duguesclin to his warriors, after he had placed the King of Spain upon his throne. His work was done; and he was going in search of other game, other work to do. His warriors demurred; they wanted to remain.

Are you a Duguesclin, or are you one of his warriors?

"I am fond of victory; less fond of fighting." The Church on earth is not the Church triumphant; she will always have enemies; she is the

Church militant. You will always have to fight here on earth. Your rest will be hereafter. "I shrink from hatred; controversy sickens me; I cannot tolerate narrow-mindedness; ridicule annoys me." Very well. This is precisely what you have to break through. You say you may not win. What does it matter? Do your best. Be ready to accept failure for the love of God, and, if you are successful, go off immediately to help God's cause in distress elsewhere. Some there are who run eagerly to where success awaits them. You will make for where the fight is fiercest.

"But, at that rate, the enemy will have me in the end." What does it matter? The only lost causes are those for which men are not ready to lose their lives.

38. THE IMPOSSIBLE

In the moral life, this word keeps recurring: "Impossible." For example, they say: "It is impossible to remain pure. Look around you; nobody keeps his purity. At your age you 'have a good time'" (and you know all that is involved in that expression). This is a common fallacy. It is subtle, and therefore does a great deal of harm.

Take as your motto: "To the man of courage nothing is impossible." Some timid soul will say: "It is impossible for me to undertake this mission. I have none of the qualities necessary for success. No one will listen to me." I answer: "Try it and see."

The best way to succeed is to dare. Use every human means: tact, kindliness, zeal, self-effacement; and since it is a work for God: prayer and self-sacrifice.

It is surprising how many impossible things determined people succeed in doing. Be one of them.

III

NECESSARY VIRTUES

39. EQUANIMITY

“**A** MAN of uneven temper,” writes La Bruyère, the moralist of the eighteenth century, “is not one man, but several.” Am I careful to preserve my equanimity?

Take one of my comrades, for example. One day he is as gay as a lark; the next he is as black as thunder. Really I am too lenient when I say “one day” and “the next”; because it is a question of hours with him, or even minutes. One minute he is joking, the next he is in a rage. Another man will have alternating periods of intense activity and total inertia: he lives by jerks.

The great forces of Nature are slow but continuous in their action. Glaciers take centuries to shift their position, but they move unceasingly. Cultivate dogged and persevering courage, in preference to that breathless, feverish activity, which will be followed by a reaction of exhaustion and depression.

Instability is said to be a fault of youth. That may, or may not, be true. In any case, be consistent. Cultivate the habit of consistency. Do not be like a weathercock, moved by every wind that blows. Do not allow yourself to

be influenced by a smile, by a failure, by the inclemency of the weather, by the caprice of a moment, by a suggestion from your companions, by the lure of an advertisement.

Be even-minded; this is the first condition necessary in order to be "somebody."

40. CONVICTION

"I like now and again," says the philosopher Hume, "to hear a man who believes what he says." Fanaticism is useless; conviction is what is wanted. Believe a thing first, before you believe *in* it.

Do not believe like the foolish and thoughtless man, who allows himself to be imposed upon by the view of the first man he meets. Every man has a certain element of simplicity in his constitution (as all swindlers know), and this is exploited shamelessly by journalists and advertisers. Even the most self-reliant are susceptible sometimes to the meanest influence. Nothing could be weaker, in certain circumstances, than a strong mind.

Believe as one who has weighed the reasons, looked into the heart of things, and stared his opponent (if he exists) out of countenance.

As soon as you are in a position to realize that a certain proposition is established as true, put your faith in it as in a principle; believe in it—that is to say, henceforth adhere firmly to this truth, appreciating its real value, its living power. Be inflexible in your adherence, putting aside all

weakness and hesitation. Believe in few truths, if you will; those in which you are bound to believe with absolute certainty are not numerous. But hold on to them tightly; not blindly, but with a reasonable assent, so as to be able to answer and convince your opponent. Believe them fervently and vigorously, so that truth may be, not only convincing, but victorious and overwhelming.

41. EXPERIENCE

“My judgements are characterized by that merciless and unqualified bluntness which is due to want of experience.”* A wit once said: “Go to the young people; they know everything.”

Experience teaches us to qualify our opinions, to be less sweeping in our assertions, and not to place implicit confidence in our own judgement. When we are young, experience is still to come; so we make short work of problems and are more categorical in our statements than we are later in life.

This may be a perfection. At any rate, use it sparingly. Never give the impression of being headstrong. Do not be one of those uncritical people who are so blunt in their statements only because they have not looked at every side of the question. Life is very complex; there are very few problems that are really simple.

Lack of precision, however, does not necessarily imply indecision. Let your view of things

* Giosuè Borsi, a young Italian convert, killed in the war, 1915.

be clear and profound. But just because you see clearly into the heart of things, you will avoid being headstrong or impetuous, because that implies lack of reflection.

There are old men, Scripture tells us, who are nothing more than children. Try, without losing anything of your ardent vigour, to acquire that incipient maturity which inspires confidence. To be young is to be a little foolish. Try not to be foolish, and still to remain young.

42. ENLIGHTENED ZEAL

“Many think they are right-minded because they have the right intention. These do more harm than others, because they do it in good faith.” De Bonald, with these words, shows how necessary it is, not so much that we should be zealous, but that our zeal should be *enlightened, intelligent*.

So many people waste their best efforts by running headlong into foolish enterprises, without previous consideration. Full of enthusiasm, they hear that zealots are wanted, and rush ahead. This is all very well. But where is all this ardour going to lead? Before you charge, look to see whether there is not a sunken road in your path (as there was at Waterloo), in which you may come down with a crash; or some hop-poles (as there were at Reischoffen), on which you may find yourself impaled.

Let your zeal be enlightened. Study a problem before setting to work to solve it. Do not

be induced to adopt a theory, or to follow a leader, merely by a well-sounding phrase or an alluring prospect. Examine a problem closely, and try to understand it. Many problems are very delicate, and an impetuous move in the wrong direction may bring about a disaster; the very least to be feared is the waste of vital energy. This is not the time for beating the air.

Choose a firm ground, and make sure of your footing. That is much better than starting off at full speed on shifting ground, with nothing but a mirage before you.

43. THE SIGN OF YOUTH

“When a man begins to look behind him, he is old.” So said Cardinal Gibbons, who even in his old age remained, in heart and thought, a young man. He continued: “I never look behind me. Lot’s wife looked back, and perished. To look back is fatal; it is the beginning of the end.

“When you have reached middle-age, you should keep around you those who have still a long life before them. Until forty, seek the company of men older than yourself. After forty keep in close contact with those younger than yourself. This is an excellent rule. Until my recent illness, I used to take a walk every day from 5 till 6. And whom did I take as my companions? Young people. They told me of their hopes, their ambitions, their plans.

“Do you want to know what I told them? I used to say to them: ‘Young man, live in expectation of great things. Hope great things from the future; hope great things from your fellow-men and from yourself. Great opportunities lie before you, greater than in the past. Only those who have courage and an understanding of the situation will profit by them when they arise.’”

We, young men of to-day, shall have great events to face. What shall we need to be able to cope with them? Courage, and an understanding of the situation. Have I both of these? Time presses. The hour is about to strike.

44. THANKSGIVING

Thank *God*. Do not forget that thanksgiving is the second end of prayer. “Prayer is the raising up of the soul to God to adore him, to thank him, etc.” How many think of saying “Thank you” to God? You are fervent enough in your petitions, but I fear you often forget to give thanks; or, if you do thank God, it is only in passing; you are too preoccupied with what you are going to ask for next, and forget the blessing you have already received.

In 1784, during the very severe winter, Louis XVI ordered fires to be lit in the barracks, hospitals, and convents, so that the poor might warm themselves. At Versailles the king himself went about giving alms, and seeing that his instructions were being carried out. At the end

of the winter, the people in thanksgiving erected near the palace a *statue of snow* in the king's honour. Imitate the gratitude of these good people; but let yours take a more lasting form.

Learn to thank *your neighbour* at least for the good that he has done you, if you have not, like the saints, the virtue of thanking also those who have wronged you.

How few say "Thank you" to their brethren! Gratitude is a centrifugal virtue. It means that for a moment at least you cease to think of yourself in order to think of your neighbour, of his benefits, of his goodness. Man is so narrow that even to receive a benefit is sometimes a reason for him to hate his benefactor. Heart of man, can you be so cold? Learn to say "Thank you."

45. JUST ANGER

Keep before your mind the scene of the Gospel in which our Lord drives the buyers and sellers out of the temple.

One of the saddest spectacles of the past generation was to see "good" people looking on with indifference at the crimes committed against God by governments and individuals.* You would think that it did not affect them at all, or, at any rate, not very deeply. Men seemed no longer to have sufficient energy of character to be angry. There were grumblings; but they were

* The author refers, no doubt, to the anti-religious activities in France during the early years of the present century (*Translator's Note*).

useless. They effected nothing, and they made people only the more depressed. What was wanted was not murmuring, but vigorous, active indignation.

"Be angry," says Scripture, "and sin not." Scripture is speaking here of that holy wrath which, in the face of open or insidious iniquity, makes men rise in courageous indignation.

Indignation, it has been said, is one of the noblest movements of the human soul, one of the most sublime voices that our fallen earth can hear. Let your heart keep enough nobility, your mind enough of its ideal, your soul enough strength of will, to show on occasion that certain hateful sights arouse your anger, that certain hateful actions disgust you, that certain outrages committed in your presence against our Lord or against one of the virtues that he loves, are intolerable to you.

Resolution: not to be bitter, sour, or continually discontented; on the contrary, to be of pleasant mien and cheerful temper; but in matters of principle—inflexible.

46. EFFECTIVE LOVE

"I make an effort to pray well, but I do not feel anything." "Not feeling anything" is no proof that your prayer is not a good one. If you kneel before God, and do your best to pay attention, to drive away distractions, to keep recollected, to think of what you are there for, to arouse within you, as best you can, ardent

affections and generous resolutions, then your prayer leaves nothing to be desired.

It is a mistake to think because *you* are not satisfied, that therefore God is not. If you have done your best, you have glorified him to the extent of which you are capable. God is delighted with you.

If you are harassed by distractions, if your imagination goes astray, do as the shepherd does with his sheep when they go wandering to right or left. He sends his dogs to bring the wanderers back to the flock. In another moment, others will try to roam. He blows his whistle, and off go the dogs again. If during the whole of your prayer you have done nothing more than this sort of thing, your prayer has been excellent, probably better than yesterday, when everything was easy. These moments are very precious, too. It is then that God, without the sound of words, makes revelations to you concerning himself and divine things, which otherwise you might never receive. Then, too, in times of darkness and aridity, if you keep on trying, you reveal yourself to God, because you show him of what you are capable.

Love may be *affective* or *effective*. The first manifests itself in words or in transports of affection; the second is shown by deeds. Both are good; but only the second is always unmistakable. Love does not consist in feeling, but in willing; not in feeling that you love, nor in liking to say so, but in *willing* to love.

47. DELICACY

To have a *delicate* or sensitive soul means:

1. To shrink from everything that is gross and sordid—that is, from sin; especially from those sins which are grossest and most sordid, those vile sins that pollute mind, memory, imagination, heart, and senses.

2. To detest, not only what is gross and sordid, but also anything that is vulgar: vulgarity in language, in manner or in conduct, both in private and in public, at your study table and in company.

But this is only the negative side. To have a sensitive soul means:

3. To love everything that is noble and fine, great and generous. And, what is more, in your love for what is noble and great to have a shade of preference for the beauty and the greatness that is hidden, more refined, more delicate.

Thus in your works of zeal, try to discern those wants which are least apparent to the public at large, and the most pitiable, and do your best voluntarily to relieve them by constant attention. In your charity to your neighbour, if you perceive that a word will give pain, omit it; if you perceive that it will give comfort, say it.

Delicacy towards God, towards your neighbour, towards yourself.

48. FORESIGHT

“It takes months for the corn to grow; a spark will set it on fire.”* The thoughtlessness of a moment may ruin a whole life.

* Ch. Péguy.

Consider the terrible power of a free act. An act of man's will seems a small thing; and yet it is enough to make a man a saint or to make him a criminal. Before a man's free act, everybody is powerless. Even God seems to allow himself, during our life on earth, to be checked by a misuse of freedom. On the other hand, think of a soul that for months has been in the state of sin. An act of repentance of a second's duration is enough to restore him to the state of grace.

Consider especially the formidable power of certain free acts performed in certain circumstances—when they ruin a past, or inaugurate a future. The act in itself seems insignificant; in its consequences, it is terrible. What destruction may be brought about by such a little careless act as throwing away a lighted match! When I was a child, I was once making necklaces with horse-chestnuts threaded on a string. My attention was called elsewhere, and I let go one of the ends of the string. The whole necklace came to grief.

Look out for surprises in the spiritual life. Foresee the consequences of your actions. In self-government, as in government, foresight is necessary.

49. HUMAN MEANS

“In works done for God,” says S Vincent de Paul, “I am more afraid of human means than of the devil himself.” Do not misunderstand this. It does not mean that we are to underrate our own resources or human talents. They, no

less than supernatural means, are God's creature. Help yourself and Heaven will help you. It is a mistake to expect everything from God, and to do nothing for oneself.

Let us give of our best, but remembering always that what gives value to our actions is supernatural effort. Sometimes we devote ourselves whole-heartedly to an enterprise, and because we have expended a great deal of *natural* energy, we expect great *supernatural* effects as a result. This is a faulty calculation. "Vanity," it has been said, "if it is in good form, can do anything." It can do much, no doubt, from the human point of view; but very little in God's sight. Only the supernatural can generate the supernatural.

How many of us have no other riches besides what natural activity can give us !

I give S Ignatius the last word: "Beforehand, act as if success depended entirely on yourself. Afterwards, admit that your success depended entirely on God."

50. ORDINARY ACTIONS

S Jane de Chantal says of S Francis of Sales that "he lived the ordinary life; but he lived it in so heavenly, in so divine a manner, as to make that the most wonderful feature of his life."

We are always wanting to do *other things*, when it would be quite enough if we did them *otherwise*. It is the way in which we give, whether to God or to our neighbour, rather than the gift itself, that counts.

Have I the "way" that counts? Has my life that heavenly and divine quality that was the chief value of the life of S Francis? Do I possess the supreme and delicate art of doing my ordinary actions in an *extraordinary way*—that is, from a sense of duty—because it is exactly what God wants of me at this particular moment? If I act in this way, I am now fulfilling exactly what is asked of me by God, who placed me in existence, and demands the constant sacrifice of my whole being. I am carrying out to the utmost my task as a creature. More glory than that I cannot give to God. A saint, nay, Jesus Christ himself, would not do otherwise. My God, whatever you will, because you will it, as you will, as much as you will!

This complete submission to the Divine Will is the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ, of whom it is said that "he did not his own will." It is constant prayer; it is the *state* of prayer; it is nothing more nor less than sanctity—sanctity within my reach. It is not a question of doing great things, but of doing well the little things of my life, and of directing them, more or less formally, more or less immediately, more or less explicitly, but always effectively, to God.

51. THE ASSOCIATION OF MALCONTENTS

It has been said that this is the greatest association in the world.* Let us not belong to it.

* P. Etienne Binet, a preacher of the seventeenth century.

Not that we must think that all is well with the world, and with this foolish optimism as our starting-point infer that the world does not need our services. But why should we say that all is wrong? And yet that is the mania from which some people—in fact, perhaps the majority—suffer.

It was very well for Napoleon's old soldiers; their courage was some excuse for their bad-temper. But they, at least, did not regard the expression of their discontent as a form of action. They grumbled, but they marched, too. Nowadays it is the grumblers that usually do no work.

The man of action is fond of his own generation. He does not disguise its faults; but he knows how to see its good qualities. This is a sufficient stimulus for him to stifle his complaints and to set about removing the cause of them, by suppressing abuses and correcting defects.

Grumbling does nobody any good, and achieves no object. It saps our own courage, and also that of our hearers. Take as your model the soldier who, when he was wounded by a bullet, put his handkerchief to his mouth. "Are you wounded in the jaw?" he was asked. "No," was the answer, "that was to prevent myself from crying out, and frightening my comrades."

"The growlers," the brave growlers, belong to another generation. We want soldiers of the same stamp to-day.

52. JOY AND SORROW

“My Lord, sorrow is the remembrance of myself, joy is the remembrance of thee.”* If you examine yourself you will find that when you are sad, it is because you have turned your mind upon yourself, retired within yourself. Every time your spirits brighten, it is because you have lost sight of self.

Put aside your little interests, your little ambitions and affairs. Do not take a dislike to everybody, or be annoyed, just because you have met with a slight repulse, or because someone has not shown you due respect. Put aside your sins, too; sometimes they occupy too much of your attention. How can you expect to be otherwise than unhappy, if you will always be thinking of unpleasantness? Say to God: “My Lord, I repent of my sins, I am very sorry; but I do not want to see them again. I will hide them in thy mercy. I care nothing for what is *mine*, if it occupies my attention to no purpose, and merits nothing in thy sight.” This is the simplest and best recipe for happiness.

Joy is the remembrance of God. A holy priest, lying in bed sick of the fever, said: “Lord, with me it goes ill; but with thee all is well. I am happy.”

A son who is happy because his Father is “well” shows the purest filial affection.

* Ernest Hello.

53. THE DUTY OF BEING CHEERFUL

"May he serve thee with gladness in thy Church." Such was the wish that the priest offered to God, when he opened the gates of Life to me.

It is my *right*, and it is my *duty* to be happy.

It is my right. Hear what the merry-makers say: "Life is an ugly dream, a painful illusion. I would willingly change it for nothingness; it would be cheap at the price. . . ." "If you could read in my soul, you would be aghast. There is not in the whole universe so unhappy a creature as I. People think I am happy. I have never been happy; not for a day; not even for an hour" (*A. France*). By reason of my baptism I have at my disposal all the treasures of heaven, as well as all the legitimate pleasures of this world. If these last are wanting, I do not lose much; I still have the essential. "I abound with joy," wrote St Paul in chains, "in the midst of my tribulations." "Joy," says Chesterton, "is the Christian's great secret."

It is my duty. I pay Jesus Christ but little honour if I live under his law like a sullen slave. "My yoke is sweet," says our Lord. At the time of my baptism this wish was made on my behalf: "May he serve thee with gladness in thy Church." We Christians have the monopoly of happiness. Others may "have a good time"; but I defy them to be happy. Happiness is the fruit of a good conscience. If we would be joyful, we must be faithful.

So let us have good spirits, gaiety, radiant joy. Let an unruffled exterior reflect the peace that is within.

54. GRACE AND HAPPINESS

"The Church calls every day a feast-day, because she considers man as already in possession of eternal life."*

The ultimate source of happiness is grace. If my soul is in the state of grace, how can it possibly be unhappy? It possesses on earth what makes the essential joy of Paradise, God himself. For, by grace, God gives himself to my soul with a special loving presence, of which glory will be but the perfect development.

A soul in the state of grace is already in heaven. In fact it *is* a heaven; not Heaven with a capital "H," not the Heaven above, but still a real heaven. "I have found heaven on earth," said a holy man, "because heaven is God, and God is in my soul."

With this certainty, not only superficially recognized, but firmly and deeply rooted in us, how can our lives be otherwise than perfectly happy? The only reason why I am so susceptible to the little joys and sorrows of this life is because I have not reflected enough on this truth: that for a true Christian it is radically impossible to be unhappy.

Many people have nothing to do with God beyond asking him for consolation. Do not be one of these. Do not consider God in the

* Ernest Hello.

light of a glorified *infirmarian*. Make it your object to console God, to give joy to God, and to show, by the exuberance of your joy, how happy you are in being his child—and his heaven. Serve God, instead of making him serve your interests. Give joy to God instead of expecting joy from him.

This is the most glorious way of fulfilling your first duty to our Lord: adoration.

IV

THE DUTIES OF OUR STATE

55.

1,440 MINUTES

THERE are 1,440 minutes in a day. How many are given to thinking of God? A modern encyclopedia* estimates that a man who lives seventy years devotes:

3	years	to	education;
8	„	„	amusements;
3	„	„	his toilet;
6	„	„	his meals;
5	„	„	walks
3	„	„	conversation;
1	„	„	military service;†
11	„	„	work;
6	„	„	reading;
24	„	„	sleep.

That is all. Time devoted officially to God: none. I see eight years for amusements, three for the toilet, six for meals. For prayer, religious worship: nothing.

It is true that for a person in the state of grace every action may, by reason of a pure intention, be equivalent to an aspiration to God, a prayer;

* *Encyclopédie de la vie pratique.*

† In France (*Translator's Note*).

an implicit prayer, but none the less a real one. But has not God a right to something more? Has he not a right to some moments of my life actually and officially reserved to him?

How do I stand with regard to my acts of worship, my prayers? What time do I devote to them? Am I persevering, fervent?

Let me review my life in the light of those words of Jeanne d'Arc: "My Lord God must be served first."

56. NOBLE INTENTIONS

"Do the least of your actions with the same love with which you would undergo martyrdom." Probably I shall not die a martyr. Not that the age of martyrs is past. The age of martyrs is never past in the Church, least of all at the present day, when Jesus Christ has so many mortal enemies. But I am not worthy of so great an honour as to give my blood for God's cause.

I may dream of it, however. If ever this honour were to fall to my lot, what is the feeling that I should like to arouse within myself, as I go to the place of martyrdom? Should I not want to make the most of those few fleeting moments separating me from eternity? Surely I should desire to concentrate into that short space enough charity to compensate for all that I had failed to give to God during my past life. How I should wish to atone, in that short moment, for my daily faults, failings and shortcomings! How I should wish in that short moment to become the saint that God wants me to be!

Very well. Let me arouse in my soul *now* the feeling that I should certainly have *then*. Let me "do the least of my actions with the same love with which I should undergo martyrdom." I am not asked for noble deeds. I am asked only for noble intentions, the noblest possible.

Am I in this state of mind? I will try to acquire it.

57. A MARTYR'S SANCTITY

"Live as if you were to be martyred to-day."* In the first place, live *as if you were to die to-day*.

Hence (1) be in the state of grace. This is the indispensable condition, without which all else is vain. Am I in the state of grace?

(2) Do all your actions to-day as well as you can—as if you were about to die.

S Aloysius Gonzaga was asked, during a game of bowls, what he would do if he were told that he had only a few minutes to live. "I should go on with my game," he answered.

To do our duty conscientiously is to do the will of God for the moment, to the full extent of our power. To do every action well is the best use of life, and, therefore, the best preparation for death.

Secondly, *Live as if you were to die to-day, by martyrdom.*

For this, try to infuse the maximum of perfection into your actions, the purest possible intention. Keep those words in mind: "Do the

* P. de Foucauld, the great Apostle of Hoggar. Read his life, by R. Bazin.

least of your actions with the same love with which you would undergo martyrdom."

This is what makes a noble life, and if God wills to grant it, a noble death.

58. MY ROOM

What have I in my room? A number of ornaments, some attractive pictures, and perhaps portraits of some favourites in the world of sport. Let us hope, at any rate, that there is nothing among them that offends against good taste or morals.

If I am a student, there will be books; study-books and others. Yes, and what others, precisely? Is my library such that anyone making an unexpected visit would find nothing to which exception could be taken? An American, who was returning from Lourdes with some pilgrims and *brancardiers*, was rather surprised to notice in the hands of some of these good people a certain book forbidden by the Church. It may have been due to ignorance in this case, or to heedlessness. In my case? In my case, it would be a strange inconsistency, a queer mixture of paganism and Christianity.

However, there is probably no question of that. There is nothing in my room but what beseems a good Catholic. But what confusion! Clothes, books, tools thrown about on the chairs and furniture; a crucifix on the mantelpiece, but with a cap thrown over it; a picture of our Lady, but dwarfed beside the prominent portrait of a favourite actress!

Strive for cleanliness in everything; in the physical as in the moral order. The surroundings in which you live are a good index to your character.

59. SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY

First, everything you do, do with spirit, do with *energy*. You will only do well what you do whole-heartedly. The less propitious the circumstances, the more you should give of *yourself*.

Secondly, be *spiritual* in all your actions. We are a mixture of two elements, matter and spirit, body and soul. Let there be in your words, thoughts, and deeds as little as possible of the first element, as much as possible of the second. Be spiritual.

Certain talk, for example, that goes on in the workshop, in the office, at recreation, or among students, is so gross, material, sensual, *unspiritual*.

Certain songs, plays, and shows are so low-minded, vulgar, soulless. Certain jokes you hear at school, in the workshop, in the office; those equivocal sayings that are said to have a double "sense," though truly they have no sense at all; how *earthly* and unspiritual all this is!

Resolution : not to allow anything in my thoughts, words, reading, amusements, friendships, or company, but what is *elevating*.

60. YOUR AGE

How old are you? "Eighteen"—"Twenty"—"Twenty-four."

What have you done with the time that God

has given you ? During the war a chaplain was enquiring of some Singalese sharpshooters how old they were. " We do not know how old we are; but we have served . . . so many campaigns." What a good answer ! They measured their lives, not by years, but by actions; not by duration, but by " campaigns."

How many campaigns have you served ? What actions have you done ? In the Mass for the dead we read: " Their works shall follow them." You will be judged, therefore, not by the time you have lived on this earth, but by the use that you have made of that time.

Do the hours of your life represent so many *works*, or are they simply *empty* ? Bazin puts these words in the mouth of one of his heroines: " I have sown nothing but sterile seed." Has the seed that you have sown been fertile ? Has your life been the preparation of a fruitful harvest, or merely a meaningless gesture ?

Let us hope at least that you have not sown cockle-seed in your neighbour's field !

61. MY HANDS

In the old museum at Brussels there is a very interesting little picture by Van Dyck. The great master depicts eight hands, which are as expressive as so many faces. The picture provides a good subject for meditation.

My hands. Am I a manual worker ? Then my hands will be hard and horny, like the hands of Joseph the carpenter, and like his, blessed by

God, if I accept and offer my daily work in the spirit in which he did.

If I work in a shop or in an office, my hands will handle cloth, parcels, or cash-books. But, whatever they handle, let them be always *pure*. Let them be always *hard-working*, and not afraid of work. Let them be the hands of an *artist*, that do their work tastefully.

Think of the glorious wounded, who lost a hand during the war, perhaps both hands. How fortunate you are to have your hands, to be able to move and use them! People never think of thanking God for this. Suppose you were to lose them! I thank thee, O Lord, for having fashioned my hands with those divine hands of thine.

And then I think of other hands. The hands of my Saviour *pierced* on the cross. What a gracious history is theirs! The little *fondling* hands of Jesus in the manger; hands that Mary kissed so lovingly; the hands which, as they grew, were bruised at the carpenter's bench; the *apostolic* hands that strewed blessings everywhere, that restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, multiplied the loaves, rubbed the ears of corn to give food to the Master, drove out the buyers and sellers from the temple; the *eucharistic* hands of the Supper-room and Emmaus; the *bleeding* hands of the crucified, quivering under the blows of the hammer, quivering with pain and with love.

Hands of Jesus, be stretched out to the Father for me; encircle me with your protection; show me your Heart.

62. INITIATIVE

Initiative is the natural product of a full, vigorous life, the well-regulated over-flow of an exuberant activity. I say, "the well-regulated over-flow," because otherwise it is no longer initiative, but temerity.

Carnegie, the future millionaire, at the age of fifteen, was a telegraphist in a great railway-company. He received a message one day to the effect that a derailment would cause congestion on the line for some hours. He took upon himself to telegraph the necessary instructions to have the passenger-trains shunted so that the goods-trains could run through. Carnegie's chief arrived at his office two hours late, and found that the whole matter had been adjusted. American-fashion, he said not a word; but from that moment Carnegie's career was assured.

There is, unfortunately, a great deal of truth in these words of Vogué: "Unhappy experience shows that the two words 'initiative' and 'integrity' are incompatible. 'Good people' sometimes back the efforts that you make for their benefit; you are fortunate if they do not oppose them; they never provoke them."*

Do not be of the number of these sorry "good people." A bishop—another American—took

* Cf. Ollé Lapruné: *Prix de la Vie*: "Many good people do not object to being led, because to advance without it needs effort."

as his motto "To dare and to do." So long as you know how to be judicious and prudent as well, you could not have a better motto.

63. COMPETENCE IN YOUR WORK

The legend of S Maternus and the carpenters is very instructive. When the saint tried to gain a hearing among the wood-carvers, they greeted him with good-humour and half-chaffingly, and even offered him a drink. But as soon as he tried to evangelize them, his voice was drowned in the whirring of saws and planes. It is very much the same in many workshops, offices, or gatherings of young men. You are a "good fellow" as long as you do not begin to "preach."

Then—to continue the legend of Alsace—a young carpenter, who had been engaged only that morning, intervened: "Why do you laugh at the old man?" They all turned to look at the questioner: "And who are you, pray?" "I can do everything," answered the young man. And the new-comer proceeded, before their eyes, to turn a table-leg, to carve a capital, and so on. "Truly you are our master," they exclaimed; "your work is superb!" The young man then explained to them that he was indeed their master, for he was Jesus, the son of Joseph. From that time forth, Maternus received a hearty welcome from the carpenters.

The attitude of working-people towards religion is that of good-humoured chaff, rather than of hostility. If there are among them some

outstanding examples of capable workmen, who are at the same time zealous Catholics, then the future is theirs. Workmen appreciate good work more than anything else. When they see that you "can do everything," they will respect you; and when once you are respected, you may talk, and be sure of a hearing.

64. GOD'S PLACE IN BUSINESS

There can be no business without conscientiousness; and there can be no conscientiousness in business without fidelity to God.

Too often it happens that God's place is confined to private and family life. There, it is understood, he has a right to be; and he is allowed there. In social and business life, you will rarely find him. "God" and "business" are two parallel lines that never meet. Morality—and still less, religion—they think, has nothing to do with the manufacture of a pair of boots, the building of a car, the making of a garment, the drawing-up of a lease, or a labour-contract.

If by this is meant that it is not the *direct* object of morality (or religion) to be concerned with these material realities, it is true. But it is a great mistake if it is intended thereby to exclude morality and justice from commercial transactions, contracts of sale or hire, and other trade enterprises.

To give God his place in business is the same as constraining oneself to be always conscientious: to sell no goods that are not *fairly* made,

fairly weighed, and *fairly* priced. In this sense it is true that "there is a Christian way of making bread," and that "safety on the roads grows in direct proportion to the number of God-fearing drivers."

Resolution : In my work and in my profits, to be always conscientious.

65. TACT

"If there were many like you," said the mutineer to his former lieutenant, "there would be few like me." The harsh insensibility of certain masters does not give the full explanation of social unrest; there are other causes, such as circumstances, institutions, and the neglect of Christian ideals. But it is worth while remembering the words which this former rebel addressed to his old officer, who had gradually brought him back to a sense of his duty by his calm self-devotion and his resolute, though affable, cordiality. An office is often discredited by the man who holds it.

"The social question," said Léon Harmel, "is a question of tact." So also Fénelon: "Justice is dishonoured when it is not joined with gentleness, tact, and condescension."

Tact accounts for a great deal; it acts like oil in machinery. It makes for easy relations, and, while it leaves each man in his own place, yet bridges the gap between them and renders imperceptible the difference between inferior and superior. It does not destroy inequalities,

but tends to make them less obtrusive, and so engenders mutual respect, a sort of family affection which renders obedience a pleasure, and the exercise of authority a possibility.

66. A LEADER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

An Arab proverb has it that a man hides his faults under his arm-pit, so that when he raises his arm to give a command, they fall, and are seen by everybody. A man who is in authority, or holds an office of any kind, has a great responsibility. *Noblesse oblige*. Nothing is worse than to aspire to a dignity without troubling to do credit to it. Do not put your light under a bushel. But if it is in full view, see that it burns with a bright and steady flame.

Many virtues are necessary in order to obey: far more qualities are needed in order to command.

At the present day, especially, when the very smallest authority is regarded with a jaundiced eye, when the least dignity is no sooner perceived than it is dishonoured, unless a man can fulfil an office with tact, delicacy, disinterestedness, calm resolution tempered with imperturbable good-humour, a clear understanding of men, of their needs, of their difficulties, of their extraordinary sensitiveness . . . unless a man possesses these qualities, it is better to forgo the honour, and to remain in obscurity.

The time is past—if it ever did exist legitimately—when authority could be high-handed,

ruthless and arbitrary, when desirable posts were held by men who had no consideration for their less privileged brethren.

67. *ESPRIT DE CORPS*

Every man must realize that he has a responsibility, by virtue of the family or association to which he belongs, which is not limited by his own personality. The honour of his family, of his association, rests upon his shoulders, and in all his actions he is bound to bear this in mind. You cannot escape your shadow. You cannot get rid of your halo. You belong, doubtless, to various confraternities or clubs. Wherever you go, in whatever surroundings you may be, you are always a member of that club, of that confraternity. Hence, wherever you are, in whatever surroundings you may be, behave as befits a member of the association which has done you the honour of admitting you to membership.

Do not let your *esprit de corps* lead you to decry the merits of other associations than your own. In this less than in anything else is there room for exclusiveness. Rather let it make you careful that no word or action of yours shall throw discredit on the association to which you belong.

68. MY PARISH

In the Church of God I form part of an essential group, my *parish*. The Council of Trent, in order to facilitate the work of saving souls,

ruled that bishops should divide their dioceses into parts, each having its own church and its own priest, or priests.

In his parish church the Catholic sees the *baptismal font*, where, as a child, he received the divine life; he sees the *communion-rails* at which, as often as he wills—every day, if he has understood aright his own faith and the desires of his Master—he may receive the Bread of Life which will enable him to live that divine life; he sees the *altar*, upon which is offered the priceless sacrifice of the Mass; he sees the *pulpit*, from which the word of God is preached; he sees the *confessional*, where he may regain God's grace, if he has been so unhappy as to lose it, and where he may receive the advice that he needs for his spiritual life.

For *yourself*, in the first place, it is a great advantage to frequent your own parish church, because there you are in contact with the general life of the Church, and with the people, the good works, and the needs that exist around you. It is, further, a great advantage for *others*, because thereby you give a good example. You must be a Catholic, not only for your own sake, not only within your own heart, but also for the sake of others and in the sight of all. You must, in your own small way, help your brethren to persevere in the faith, and in the practice of it.

A certain great lawyer who practised in Paris had a country-house at Angerville. He always made his Easter duties twice: the first time in Paris for the sake of the people of the neighbour-

hood, and his colleagues at the Bar or in Parliament; the second time at Angerville, for the edification of the villagers. That is a good example of the parochial spirit.

Resolution : to see how I stand with regard to my love for my parish; my relations with the parochial clergy, the help I give to parochial works; in short, parochial spirit.

69. CONFESSION

“ If it is necessary for the salvation of society that it return to the confessional, then, so I have been told, society is lost.”*

Take away confession, chastity, and hell, and the Church would have no more enemies.

Have I, a member of the Church, the respect, both in theory and in practice, which I owe to this great sacrament? Suppose that we had only the sacrament of baptism. Suppose that we had only the sacrament which gives us the divine life, and that there were no sacrament whereby, if we lost it, we might be restored to the state of grace, restored to the possession of our supernatural treasures!

Happily for us, there is the sacrament of Penance. I have sinned mortally once; I can regain grace. Even though I may have sinned ten, fifty, a hundred times, I can always regain the state of grace.

I must tell my sins, certainly; and that is hard. That is the reason why the enemies of Catholi-

* Louis Veuillot.

cism will have nothing to do with it. It is easy to see where the shoe pinches, and, therefore, their opposition makes little impression.

But, recognizing as I do the divine origin of confession, do I avail myself of it as the commandments of the Church and my own needs require? If I have fallen into *grave* sin, do I not wait several days before going to receive absolution? Is this reasonable in a Catholic? If I am habitually in the state of grace, do I go regularly to my confessor to receive from him the direction which I need?

70. THE WORD OF GOD

Savonarola* used to compare those who listened to his sermons to the crows on the clock-tower. The first time they hear the bells ring, they are frightened away; but soon they become accustomed to the sound, and fly away no more.

There are many who, the first time that they hear a truth which strikes home, set about turning over a new leaf. But then they get used to it. The bells may ring; but they will not move. If I had profited by all the sermons I have heard, what a saint I should be!

In the early days of Christianity S Peter converted 3,000 people by one sermon. How is it that nowadays 3,000 sermons will not make one convert? The Holy Ghost has not changed. The preacher of those early days was not faultless. Doubtless he had special graces. But, humanly

* The great Dominican apostle of Florence, at the end of the fifteenth century.

speaking, he was not a stylist, nor an orator. And, supernaturally speaking, was it so very long since he had denied his Lord, and been severely reprimanded by him?

The difference is due largely to the hearer. Instead of coming to church to judge myself, I come to sit in judgement. Beforehand, I ask: "Who is preaching?" not: "What is he going to preach about?" Afterwards: "What did you think of the sermon?" not: "How am I going to apply the sermon to myself?"

Remind yourself sometimes of Savonarola and the crows.

71. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Have you not often felt the need of confiding in someone? It is this need that the Church meets by spiritual direction. If you have not felt this need, it only proves the more clearly how useful it would be for you to open your heart to someone, to make known your aspirations, your temptations, your spiritual strength and weakness.

The man in whom you confide will, of course, be no ordinary man; he will be a priest—one whose Divine mission it is to guide and to teach. Choose a confessor, as far as possible a fixed confessor, who will also be your director—that is, a priest to whom you will tell not only your sins, the evil that you have done, but also the good to which you aspire, and the difficulties that you find in the way of attaining it. With your director, be quite open and spiritually sincere.

See how you stand in this matter, and make your resolution accordingly. It is one of the fundamental things in your spiritual life.

72. FRIENDS

Who is it that said that "friends are the thieves of time"? Was it a misanthrope? Possibly. In that case we may forget what he said. He belongs to the school of that grande dame of the eighteenth century who said: "Those who come to see me, honour me; those who do not, please me."

But perhaps it was someone who appreciated the real value of every minute, and the futility of so much idle chatter and gossip. It may well be that at the very moment which I am going to waste in this way there are many who require my presence, that the home which awaits me in the future requires my strenuous efforts, or that God wants my work or my prayer.

There are so many people to whom one would like to say sometimes: "If you want to waste your time, at least do not waste it in making other people waste theirs!" But, after all, until the end of the world those who want to work will always be condemned to listen to the chatter of the incurable idler.

There is a proverb which runs: "God save me from my friends; I will deal with my enemies." But we need not exaggerate. Seek in friendship what God intends us to find in it—namely, the most pleasant pastime that man can have. Con-

versation between noble souls who understand each other is most profitable. But there are friends and . . . friends.

Keep the good friends. As for the others, ask God to free you from them, for it is of them that the proverb speaks. If necessary, help them out with the broom. It is a most effective method.

V
APOSTOLIC ZEAL

73. THE PRESENT DAY

“**I**F anyone were to ask me,” said Montalembert, “in what age I should have preferred to live, I should answer ‘Now.’” And on another occasion: “If I were asked at what period in the life of Christ I should have liked to live, I should choose the moment in which Christ was ascending the hill of Calvary.”

Fundamentally the two answers are identical. “Now” and “the moment in which Christ is ascending the hill of Calvary,” are one and the same. Pascal said that “Christ will be in agony until the end of the world”; and Monsignor Gay: “It is clear that if Christ were to come upon the earth once more, he would immediately be crucified again, as he was the first time.”

This is a good age in which to live, because now Christ needs valiant champions. Montalembert wrote at the age of seventeen that he had no patience with those young men “who are good for nothing, know nothing, and can do no good to anybody”; and he made a pact with his friend Cornudet that “their morals should be beyond reproach, that they should practise their religion openly, and devote themselves to the cause of freedom.”

Make the same resolution.

74. PRECURSORS

“Everywhere and at all times God sends precursors.”* Learn to foretell the future, so as to prepare for the future; because you cannot prepare for what you do not foresee. The first element of power is foresight. The world needs precursors.

Sometimes they call “go-ahead” people those adventurous spirits who are anxious to break with the past, simply because it is the past, who long for the future, simply because it is the future. We want none of those precursors. Nothing is a greater help in preparing for the future than a knowledge and use of the past. But even granting that, we are of opinion that the future has several surprises in store for us, and that there are many things yet for us to learn, infinitely more than we know already.

The prize goes to those who can foretell what the morrow will be, and in the present devote themselves to bringing about the morrow, to making the morrow what they want it to be. “Let us live in the present,” says the writer I have quoted, “like men who belong to the future.” This was a favourite saying with him. For you it may be a very fruitful reflection.

“When an idea ceases to arouse the enthusiasm of the young,” it has been said, “then it is doomed.” Be full of enthusiasm for the ideas that you want to see live, the ideas that through

* Abbé de Tourville.

you and your generation will live: a sound, healthy family life, true freedom for all, stable and responsible government, the first place given to Christ in all things, and the triumph of charity over controversy.

Make a list of the things you want changed within the next ten years. As far as you are able, with the help of others, bring them about now.

75. IN SEARCH OF NEW WORLDS

"If you were to put out your stocking on Christmas night," asked a certain newspaper, "what would you like to find in it in the morning?" One of the answers was: "Illusions."

There are illusions which are nothing but idle fancies, but there are also noble ideals which the sober-minded brand as illusions, but which are in reality the evidence of a more far-seeing, acute mind and a more ardent will. A humorist imagines the letter which a serious-minded savant must have written to Christopher Columbus on the eve of his embarkation for America:

"I hear, my dear friend, that you are about to set forth in search of a New World, and I may tell you quite candidly that I do not congratulate you on the project. Is the earth not big enough already? Did the men of the past dream of discovering a new continent? Will not the advice of all your true friends, the threats of Fate, which is certainly against you, will nothing persuade you to remain quietly in Europe like the rest of us? You must think yourself far superior to other

men, if what is enough for them is not enough for you !

“I am all the more pained because I have always had a real affection for you. . . . You used to say sometimes that you ‘loved the sea,’ and I advised you to write some verses about the sea as a little exercise. Could I have dreamed that you were going to take poetry so seriously ! Had I known that you had so pronounced a penchant for navigation, I should not have dissuaded you from making a few short journeys: travelling is an education for youth. But, my dear friend, I ask you: Is it not carrying things rather far to go in search of a New World ? Why can you not be satisfied with the Old, if we are ?”

Never mind, what people say ; follow your star.

76. “ART THOU HE THAT ART TO COME ?”

One day the Jews, seeing that John the Baptist worked miracles, asked him whether he was the Saviour that everyone was expecting, or whether they must again fall back upon others, and rest their hopes on them.

People ask the same about you, the young generation: “Are these the saviours ? Have they the qualities necessary in order to raise the Church’s prestige in this country, and to give Christ his rightful place in society ? Or are they, like so many others, mere ciphers ?”

At the beginning of the wars of the Vendée, some young men called on Henri de la Rochejaquelin, a youth of twenty. “We hear,” they

said, "that you are going into the provinces. Surely you cannot do that, sir, when your peasants are fighting. Come with us; the whole country wants you, the whole country is waiting for you." "I am with you," he replied; and then this improvised leader addressed his improvised army: "I am only a child; but by my courage I will prove myself worthy to lead you. If I advance, follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I die, avenge me."

There is, doubtless, little proportion between the gigantic work that is to be done, and your humble devotion. But begin by doing what you can, all that you can. Do it quietly, serenely and carefully, just as if there were nothing else in the world to do, as if that alone were sufficient to remedy every evil that exists.

If you do this, you will have done your share. If a hundred, if a thousand were to do likewise, we should be saved.

Be the first cell that repairs the damaged tissue.

77. USE OF MY LIFE

An aviator who had been seriously wounded, after five years in hospital, wrote: "Your life will be short; let it be *full*. What are twenty years? It is nearly ten years since I joined the army. Twice that, and my life is finished, and I shall stand before my Creator. How many souls shall I be able to present to him?"

Think of the *shortness* of life, and the *return* it yields.

The *shortness* of life. I am sixteen, twenty, twenty-four. That is to say, I have had those years, and I have them no more. They are past. They are swallowed up in God's eternity, for ever. Of my own I have only the minute that is passing now, and it is so short, so frail.

As many years more, perhaps even double the number, perhaps less, and I shall be before the judgement-seat of God. So soon ?

And what shall I say ? What *return* has my life yielded ? When our Lord comes again upon this earth to judge all men, will he, Scripture asks, find more charity here ? Will he, as far as my life is concerned, find more love for God, more charity to my neighbour ? Will he find more faith, more religious feeling ? If not, what has been the use of my life ? No one at the present day—or indeed at any time—has the right to save his own soul alone. What sheaf of souls shall I have to present to God ? Alas ! Perhaps I may have to present a list of the souls that I have damned. Where are the souls that I have helped to heaven ? How many are they ?

Let my life be *full*, both for myself and for others.

78. GREAT ASPIRATIONS

“Unhappy is the man,” says a modern philosopher, “who feels the want of nothing.” In other words, unhappy the man who is not tormented by great aspirations.

Men may be divided into two categories. There are those who see nothing ; I mean those

for whom the foreground is everything; they have no eye for perspective. They never catch a glimmer of light upon anything but their own work, their own pleasure, their own selves. There are others who see the foreground and give it the importance it deserves, but beyond that they discover whole worlds.

By all means, work at your profession, the duties of your state, the occupations of the moment. You have to sanctify your soul, not apart from your present existence, but through your daily life. By all means take the amusements that are necessary for your age and condition; they are the rightful recompense of your work. But beyond that, make discoveries. Discover those *souls* in whom God does not live. Discover *society*, which disowns or blasphemes Christ. Discover the *masses* which are led away to destruction by false shepherds.

Is there a thrill within me, when I gaze upon these horizons that call for apostles? Do I nourish within me the hope of a new world? Do I resolve that I will be one of its most active builders?

Blessed are they that thirst.

79. THOUGHT FOR OTHERS

Yesterday I boarded a tram; it was winter. At five successive stops people alighted, but no one thought of closing the door behind him. They were going. What did they care about those who remained behind!

There are very few people who, in similar circumstances, think of others before thinking of themselves. A man gets out of a train and sees that some friends are waiting for him. He rushes up to shake hands, blocking the passage for others. But what does he care? So much the worse for them. People do not think.

They do not do it on purpose. They do not think. They lack what one may call the *social sense*, that feeling which is the product of Christian charity, which makes us always foresee the consequences that may result to others from our actions. What a number of little—and great—annoyances we inflict on others, simply for want of reflection!

I do not think of it. Well, think of it in future. Think of the consequences of your actions. Very few of them are without some issue. What a pity it is that some people are anxious to do so much good, and yet, through want of thought, are nothing but a nuisance!

80. SELF-DEVOTION

There can never be sadness where there is self-sacrifice. If a man devotes himself to a good work, the first person to benefit by it is himself. If I devote myself to the good of my neighbour, the nearest neighbour that I benefit is my own soul. Besides gaining merit for it, I give it joy. It is blessed to receive; it is still more blessed to give.

Why is it that there is such an atmosphere of

joy in the houses of the Little Sisters of the Poor and similar institutions? It is because there all is given without reserve. Give, therefore. With both hands give yourself, your initiative, the humble services that you are able to render. Do not do it for the sake of the joy and satisfaction that you will receive as a reward. Do it because it is a way in which you can prove your love of God and your neighbour. Receive the joy that will result as something over and above your deserts, as a gift of God, for which you bless him and render thanks.

Devote yourself to those works in which you can give more of yourself, in which you can make greater sacrifices. Of an apostle among the lepers it was said: "If a man seeks souls in such bodies it is quite certain that he seeks nothing but souls."

Choose for preference those missions in which the only object is the salvation of souls.

81. THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

The highest mountain in the world is Mount Everest, a peak of the Himalayas, over 29,000 feet high. The ascent was first attempted in 1893. It failed. Another attempt was made in 1919, which failed similarly. Again in 1921 a further attempt was unsuccessful. In 1922 mountaineers reached successively a height of 25,000, 26,000, and even 27,300 feet. On the 6th of June three Europeans with fifteen porters were within sight of success when a cracking sound was heard,

and an avalanche swept upon them, burying seven of the porters. The attempt had again to be abandoned.

To those who love the calm and uneventful life of the plains this might well seem folly. But the climber hears the call of the heights. He pitches his camp where the temperature is at 35 degrees. But what does he care? The vision of the summit is ever before him. *Excelsior!* When the soul is uplifted by an ideal, its energy never tires.

It costs me an effort to quit my cosy seat in front of the fire, to give up some of my little comforts in order to go to some club-meeting in the evening, or to go on some errand for a friend. It is hardly the same as climbing Mount Everest. And yet, I am so lazy. The thought of this aroused the indignation of S Francis Xavier: "What! men will go to the ends of the earth in search of rich spices, in order to make money. And would I not go to the ends of the earth for the love of Jesus Christ!"

82. "THY KINGDOM COME"

How slowly the Kingdom of God comes! Just think for a moment. There are about 1,500,000,000 human beings in this world. Of these, 1,000,000,000 are pagans—that is to say, two-thirds of the whole world. The other third is divided into two halves, one half Catholic, the other half schismatics or heretics. And it is now nearly 2,000 years after Christ!

It is true that a man may be saved in a false religion, as long as he is in good faith. God, says S Thomas, would send an angel, if necessary, to reveal to a sincere soul all the truths that he need know. There are many who belong to the soul of the Church; that is, all those who are in the state of grace, wherever they may be. But how sad it is to think that the body of the Church, the visible Church, after so many centuries, has gained so small a triumph. Two hundred and fifty—according to the latest statistics 286—millions outside the visible unity of the Church, and 1,000,000,000 pagans! Do I realize what 1,000,000,000 means? That number of seconds from the death of our Saviour would take you to 6 o'clock in the evening of April 18, 1902! 1,000,000,000 pagans! If they were to march past my window day and night four by four, it would take me eight years and fifty-six days to see them pass!

And I stand still in idleness! Am I not haunted by the thought of the salvation of the world? The harvest indeed is great. I hardly realized it. Can I not be one of the labourers?

83. THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT

Why is it, while so many toil by word and deed, that so little result is obtained? Because *God* is not in all this activity.

To undertake a mission without an intense interior life is useless; it is practically a waste of energy. It is not our words that do any good,

it is not our words that restore or increase grace in the souls of men. Only the grace of God can work this miracle; and you will only receive the power of dispensing this grace, if you live near to God by a life of intense prayer, and so receive the key to his Heart.

In some play there is a singer, who, as soon as he opens his mouth, thrills his hearers with such melody that they are rapt to attention. They are ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. "Who gave you this voice?" he is asked. "The Ocean," he answers, "the Ocean from which I come." For years he had wandered by the seashore, lost in contemplation of the ocean, seeking to rival its voice. It was from this contact with the ocean, from those reflections, deep as the ocean itself, from his untiring practice, that he had drawn his wonderful power.

Who will give to my words the power of conquest? Above all things, contact with God, the limitless Ocean from which all grace flows. The interior life is the soul of all apostleship.*

84. THE LIMITS OF SELF-SACRIFICE

A young workman, by becoming a Catholic, incurred the furious anger of his father. One evening on his return from church, his father drove him out of the house with the brutal words, "You can go and pass the night where you will."

* See the admirable work of Dom Chautard: *L'Âme de tout Apostolat*.

The young man went out into the street and made his way towards the fortifications, to look for a corner in which to pass the night. Suddenly, as he put his hand in his pocket, his fingers closed upon a little book which he always carried with him. It was the *Imitation of Christ*. He opened it and read by the light of a street-lamp: "You have not yet resisted unto blood."* "Why complain, then?" said he to himself; "be of good heart." Early next morning, still drenched with the night-dew, he called on the priest at the church to ask for Holy Communion before setting out for his work.

Have I the same pluck, the same simplicity combined with heroic self-sacrifice?

85. CONCERTED ACTION

"One of the qualities most needed at the present day is concerted action."† "Has fate decreed," it has been asked, "that the wicked will always be as one in their brutal hatred, while good people never learn to be united?"

It is difficult to be united. An aptitude for concerted action is not innate in man. Self-conceit has to be sacrificed; one's own ideas have to be given up; one has to submit to constituted authority. This self-denial can only be attained by effort, especially in the case of the more talented, precisely because they have the stronger personality. There can be no concerted action without discipline, and men are not born dis-

* Heb. xii 4.

† Paul de Rousiers: *La Science sociale*.

ciplined. Submission of mind and will must be learned, and learned often at heavy cost.

It is necessary to be united. An association without concerted action is like a flock of sheep. Members must agree as to the end to be obtained, accept the same authority, and obey in everything that the success of the common enterprise demands. Otherwise you have anarchy.

Catholic associations are opposed by associations which are both united and powerful. If they are to win, they must above all strive for unity: unity among the members of the same association; unity with other associations.

Avoid narrow-mindedness. It is fatal.

86. HAND ON THE TORCH

A corporal was called upon by his colonel to carry an important despatch to division. The errand was a dangerous one, and the man fell mortally wounded before he had delivered his message. Determined that it should get through, he dragged himself to a cross-road and placed himself there so that he might be seen by passers-by. There he lay on his back, by a superhuman effort keeping his arm stretched in the air, and clutching the despatch in his hand, so that another rider coming along might take and deliver it.

Each generation of young men as it comes up, thinks that it is from them that the world has been hoping for salvation. They are right. It is in the young men that the world's hopes are centred. Without them the world would grow

old and feeble, and would make no progress. It is right that they, while treating their fathers with respect, should, nevertheless, bring a new message. It may be that they will not bring salvation to the world, that this glory is reserved to their successors. So be it. Let them hand on the torch to those that come after.

Hand on the torch. Victory lies ahead.

VI *THE FUTURE*

87. LIVING

THERE is a comedy in which an uncle asks his nephew, a flighty youth of twenty who is wasting his life, concerning his means of livelihood. "How do you live?" "Oh, uncle," is the reply, "I don't live. I exist—and that's something."

How many there are who have no higher ideal than merely to exist; to exist, and enjoy themselves, nothing more. But to live, to gain some return for their existence, to make use of their youth, their talents (if they have any), their money (if they possess any), to better the condition of their fellows, to spread the kingdom of God—this is the last thing they desire.

Your ideal should be to *live*, not merely to exist.

Develop the talents that God has given you, not out of selfish pride, in order to be "somebody," or to outshine your fellows, but to get interest out of the capital that God has given you, to procure his greatest glory. So much as regards yourself.

As regards others, radiate around you, as far as possible, light, enthusiasm and warmth. Do not put this off till later, but do it now; make it the rule of your daily life.

What is it that people want most at the age of eighteen or twenty? To live. Very well; live. Get down to the realities of life. Live.

88. PREPARATION

It is interesting to notice what a considerable part in his plans God assigns to preparation. Before the coming of the Word, a preparation of 4,000 years, probably much more; before the birth of Christ, the nine months since the Annunciation. The Saviour was born; but it was not yet time to show him forth to the world; thirty years of hidden life preceded his public ministry.

Imitate the Word. Attach supreme importance to the slow development of the seed, which will bear fruit later at the harvest.

Often you want to finish before you have started. If success does not immediately crown your efforts, you are discouraged. Do you imagine that it takes only a few minutes to make a saint? When Fr. Olivaint, the martyr of the Commune, said that "it takes less time than courage to make a saint," he did not mean that time is unimportant, but that courage is the more important factor.

"Time does not spare what you do without it." If you have hurried over your work, you must not expect good results. Sometimes they may surpass your expectations. Usually the contrary is the case. Things are worth what they cost you.

Make sure of your preparations. Make the necessary effort in your room, in your office or

in your workshop, and then be content to wait. Later on, your results will be the more satisfactory and your position the more assured for the attention that you have devoted to your preparation.

89. ARE YOU CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD?

"I am convinced," says René Bazin, "that there are many men in the world who have had the vocation to the priesthood and have failed to respond to it." Either I have decided on my career, or I have not. If I have, very well. If I have not, am I convinced that the priesthood is not for me?

The first question: are there any insuperable, or at least, serious obstacles in the way of my becoming a priest? My health, for example, incapacity for the necessary studies, a temperament or a past which seems incompatible with the priesthood. Examine yourself, sincerely.

If there is no obstacle, a further question. Have you any attraction towards the priesthood? I mean a supernatural attraction: a desire for better things, for the salvation of souls, for a greater likeness to Christ. Any natural reluctance that you may feel at the prospect, for example, of leaving your parents or the comforts of life, and so on, is not of itself an obstacle.

Perhaps you do feel this supernatural attraction sometimes, in a more or less pronounced degree. Note that this attraction is not essential. Is it enough? How can I be sure that God calls me? If I were sure, I would go.

Put the problem the other way. The question is not so much: "What does God require of me?" as "What am I willing to give to God?"

Read once more our Lord's conversation with the young man (Matt. xix 16-23). A retreat will give you a clear light on the matter.

90. GIVING ALL

"Until you have given all, you have given nothing." Such was the answer of a brave young aviator when he was asked: "Are you going up again? That is madness; you have already been up three times to-day. You have done enough."

What about yourself? Have you up to the present moment given *anything*? "I am conscious of having made many reservations in my sacrifices to God. I have rarely offered him perfect works. I pray, but very badly; I devote myself to good works, but only half-heartedly; I work, but I am sometimes very remiss." Examine yourself. Whatever you do, try to do it well.

But is that the full extent of what you are able to give? Does not God ask something more of you? And if he were to ask *all*, would you give it? "But I should have to give up these comforts of mine." Perhaps you would; but say to yourself "Until you have given all, you have given nothing." "But I should have to give up my position and think of something else, of a more generous life." In this matter use great

prudence; see that you are making no mistake. But if you are sure that what others have decided to do, you also could do if you wished, then, why not take the decisive step? "Until you have given all. . . ."

"But I should have to leave my own people and forgo the joys of home." Maybe; I do not know. But after all, why not, if there is a great vocation for you?

"It will be difficult." Possibly; therefore be humble, and pray. Pray that you may see; and if you see that you must take the decision, then remember the words: "Until you have given all, you have given nothing."

91. MISSED VOCATIONS

Three freedoms intervene in the salvation of a soul. First, the freedom of God, who grants grace as he wills; secondly, the freedom of the soul in question, which can accept or reject that grace; thirdly, the freedom of each one of us, in a greater or smaller measure, according as God has destined us more or less to be an instrument for good with regard to the soul in question.

Suppose that someone is called by God to be an apostle, to evangelize his fellow-men, and that he fails to respond to the call. What will become of the souls who might have been saved by his ministry? It is not for you to argue that God in his Providence will provide for them. Think, therefore, of the responsibility of one who loses his vocation.

It is sometimes said that to refuse to follow one's vocation is a sin. It is not a sin, in itself. In order that there may be a sin, there must be a commandment. Here it is not a question of a commandment, but of a counsel—"if you will." Not to will (if it is the case of a real vocation) may be cowardly, may be ungenerous, may be an imperfection, but it is not a sin, except in the very rare case in which a man has evidence that outside that vocation there is no salvation for him.

But the evil of missing your vocation is not so much that of failing to correspond with God's greater graces, but rather that of refusing to help those souls that may need your ministry.

Think of your responsibility in this matter. Ask yourself what God requires of you. Do not miss your vocation.

92. MARRIAGE

"Every young man ought from an early age to accustom himself to the idea of marriage."* Since—as I have sincerely decided—the priesthood is not for me, God calls me one day to establish a family.

There are some who seem to be afraid of a young man entertaining the thought of his future home. This thought is not to be feared; it is to be made pure and chaste. It must be preserved from the contamination of evil passions; it must be guarded as a treasure never to be desecrated. If that is done, then such thought will enlighten,

will purify, will give birth to generous aspirations.

The day will come when I shall be joined for life to a *chosen creature* whom God secretly intends for me. When that day comes, what shall I wish that I had been now? This book that I am going to read, this conversation in which I sometimes engage, these things that I sometimes look at . . .; what would *she* think of them? If she could read in my heart all the vileness of my youthful years, what would she feel?

Then, there will be little ones. I shall be a *maker of life*. There will be, if God wills, little beings who owe their existence to me, and—awful thought!—they will be, partly at least, *in my own image*. Am I, at the present moment, one whose life is worthy of being transmitted? Look into the future, see those tiny eyes, in the cradle, beseeching you. “Serve God faithfully. It is so difficult to lead a good life when one is not of holy parentage. Father, sanctify yourself, so that we may not find it too hard to be saints!”

93. BEATRICE

Ozanam writes of Dante: “While he was still a child, he was often urged by an inner voice to visit a house near by, where there was a young girl. Every time, he returned from his visit a better man. Later on, at the age when his passions troubled him, it was enough to see in the distance the pure countenance of Beatrice, in order to render the evil powerless.”

It is but too true that many young men—some of my companions perhaps; if so, avoid them like the plague—see nothing in a woman or a girl but a plaything, an object for their pleasures, or else an occasion for sniggering at untoward allusions, and unwholesome jests. Many an office, workshop, or warehouse is nothing more nor less than a hot-bed of corruption.

You, my son, meditate often on these golden words of Lacordaire: “My friend, child of your mother, brother of your sister; child of your mother, who brought you into this world in the sacred bond of matrimony; brother of your sister, whose virtue you protect and cherish, do not dishonour that great blessing which gave you your manhood. Be chaste. Keep within your frail flesh the holy source from which love springs and flowers. In this world there is one, whose place is between your mother and your sister, a frail sweet creature, destined by God for you. Already she lives for you, though she knows you not. She rebukes in herself anything, however trifling, that might one day displease the least of your desires. Keep your heart for her, as she keeps hers for you.”

94. LOVE

“I can forgive young people anything. But there is one thing that estranges my heart from another; it is to hear a young person *laugh at love*.”*

* Abbé Perreyve.

If you tell me what you laugh at, I will tell you who you are. How is it possible to laugh at love?

God might, had he so willed, have increased and multiplied living creatures directly, without the intermediary of parents. But instead, he chose to devise love. Two beings, who do not know each other, perhaps have never even seen each other, meet one day, and discover that there is a certain affinity between them, a reciprocal sympathy or attraction. If there is no obstacle, these two contract a definite bond, and so are united for ever, and become capable of multiplying life. God deigns to use them as instruments in order to increase the number of living beings: and these living beings, by virtue of their destiny, are immortal. Their life will never be quenched. Is it possible that people should find anything laughable in so precious a device!

Since the exercise of this function brings with it a heavy responsibility—that of providing for the needs of the family—God in his goodness has annexed to it a certain pleasure. Now, due order demands that pleasures and responsibilities should not be separated. Hence, voluntarily to seek the pleasure, and at the same time to run counter to those responsibilities, is to oppose God's plan; and since the matter is a grave one (that of the production of a living being) it must always be in itself a grave sin.

Meditate on this plan of divine Providence; admire it, respect it. Never allow anyone in your presence to insult this wonderful device: love.

95. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOME

Alexandre Dumas, speaking of marriage, says: "They study each other for two weeks, love each other for three months, fight each other for three years, and put up with each other for thirty. Then their children recommence the same process."

That is a frivolous way to talk of marriage. But how many young people there are who, carried away at the age of twenty by a groundless enthusiasm, or a blind passion, lay up for themselves a life which is not much better.

Is it enough to study each other for three weeks? Perhaps you know the book in which this account of an engagement occurs: "She was told one day that a young man had seen her twice, and wanted to marry her. She simply laughed at the idea during the week that preceded the interview. She saw the young man one Sunday, walked with him for half-an-hour, and when he asked whether he might hope that she would be his wife, answered: 'Yes,' immediately."

If you want to make a serious marriage, and not to contract a union which begins as a *duet*, and ends as a *duel*, you must be more prudent.

Hold your heart with both hands. Force yourself not to love until you have seen that you *can* love. It is going to be hard to stifle your love, if you find that you must break off a connection in which your heart is already engaged. It is going to be still harder, when once you are married, to be obliged to live together without

any of those things that render it tolerable. Afterwards, it will be too late. Now there is still time. Later, you will have to close your eyes. Now, open them, and choose well and carefully. Do not be absurdly fastidious, but use foresight.

96. HEREDITY

“Every man is an heir; every man is an ancestor.”*

Man is essentially a dependent being. There exists a solidarity between myself and a whole line of forebears, and between myself and my descendants, if I have any. From this point of view, at any rate, anyone who intends to rear a family needs to be a greater saint than one who aspires to celibacy.

I am an heir. What a book might be written on the manifold influences—of race alone—which have made me what I am! There is something of my parents in me, something of my father, something of my mother. There are traces in me of still more ancient origin. Who knows whether some impulse of mine is not due, partly, at any rate, to some holy ancestor who is now forgotten, but who was a saint!

I have *received* much, therefore. But—to leave the past—what about the future? What am I, in my turn, going to *give*? As heir, I am not wholly free to accept or refuse the heritage that is transmitted to me. As ancestor, it depends

* Augustin Cochin.

on me, and only on me, what blessings I am going to pass on to my descendants.

True, we must not exaggerate the law of heredity to the extent of claiming that it destroys free-will. But, on the other hand, we must not deny that it exists. It is a terrible responsibility to have to remind myself that some youthful prank, if I indulge in it, may one day in the far future have a mysterious and tragic repercussion on my descendants !

I am an ancestor. Let me form my character with the idea that I am, so to speak, at the head of the column, that I am a " leader "; that after me there come others who will depend on me, and will in part be what I have been, stronger if I have been strong, more inclined to evil or to mediocrity, if I have been a weakling or a coward.

97. IMMORTALITY

" Man may disown his greatness; he cannot throw it off. The soul that wallows is none the less immortal. He may live as an animal; but he will die, be judged and be punished as a man."*

The terrible thing about man's existence is, not that he must die, but that he can never die. If it were only possible, after a dissolute life, to disappear wholly and for ever !

No. Once cast into existence, I am condemned to exist for ever, for weal or woe. For weal if I remain faithful, if I do here on earth what I

* L. Veuillot.

was made for; for woe, if I transgress God's will, and die in that state. But cease to exist I cannot. I am condemned to *life*, condemned to *eternity*.

Let me think well on this. Living as I do in the midst of what passes away, I reflect but little on what endures. Let me accustom myself to this thought: that once born, I cannot escape existence. Here on earth, I flee from God, I think to escape him. Vain hope! He holds me close. Even at the price of my blood, I cannot buy annihilation. When I came out of nothingness, I escaped for ever from its clutches; it cannot reclaim me.

I live, *immortally*. Let me be deeply concerned only with that which never dies.

VII

FEASTS AND DEVOTIONS

98. CHRISTMAS

THE grotto of Bethlehem; the stable of old time. Not those devout representations of the crib, made of painted card-board, but the real crib, comfortless, measuring about 40 feet by 12; the stable open to the wind, filled with the odour of cattle. Contemplate this scene.

At Bethlehem, now, in the Basilica of the Nativity. On the pavement, let into the white marble, is a silver star, with these words: *Hic, de Virgine Maria, Jesus Christus natus est.* “Here, Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.”

There, on that spot—nothing is more certain—Jesus was born of the Blessed Virgin. What a mystery! Truly was she “blessed among women,” this young mother that I contemplate beside this strange crib!

Jesus was born. Jesus, the Word, that is, God himself. So wonderful is this mystery that the Church bids her priests bend the knee every time the Incarnation is mentioned during the Mass; in the middle of the *Credo*, and at the end of the last gospel. This little child is the Great Father

of all ! Kneel and adore him. The Great Father is very tiny ; go quite close to him ; you need not fear !

99. THE ASCENSION

“ Be ye witnesses,” said our Lord to his Apostles—and to all of us—before he ascended into heaven. Nothing belies the Gospel more than the feeble way in which some Catholics live the Gospel. As a body, they are called the “ faithful.” An ironical title ! A strange fidelity !

“ *He* a Catholic !” says the unbeliever ; and with this bad example as his warrant, he tries to excuse himself from seeking after the truth, or from practising the truth when he has found it.

If every believer were a true believer, and, consequently, a practising believer, then there would be no unbelievers, or very few. The splendid example of the Catholic life, lived as it should be lived, would draw all souls to Christ, and none would have an excuse for not believing. But the Catholicism of some is so anæmic that it were almost better, for the honour of our religion, that it did not exist at all.

Let me, at least, humbly but bravely practise my religion in the eyes of all, so that men may see, from my loyalty to the Gospel, how divine that Gospel is.

100. PENTECOST

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that the twelve were accused on the day of Pentecost

of being intoxicated. And so they were—with enthusiasm. Twelve men filled with that enthusiasm were enough to convert the whole world. And consider how ignorant, how timid those men were. But that was before Pentecost. When the Holy Ghost had descended upon them and had spoken to their souls, uplifting them with his grace, then they were ready to go to the ends of the earth. Men tried to make them hold their tongues. “We cannot be silent,” they answered. They must needs preach the gospel to the world. Whole crowds were converted. They were threatened, arrested, even killed. No matter: the bark of Peter was launched. Men sought to drown her in blood; the first three centuries saw fierce persecutions levelled against the Church. Throughout history, with occasional periods of peace, she has ever suffered the oppression of tyrants. But still the little grain of mustard-seed continues to grow.

What brought about this miracle? Enthusiasm; enthusiasm, which means literally “in the heart,” “in the breast.” With the Holy Ghost in your heart, with the Holy Ghost in your soul awakening all the powers of your being, with all your energies on the alert, with all your good impulses aroused, you are irresistible.

Nothing is accomplished without enthusiasm. If your heart is aflame, you will shed about you the light that conquers.

101. THE ASSUMPTION

There are four ways in which we may die: *without* love, *with* love, *for* love, or *of* love.

To die *without* love is the terrible fate of the sinner, who dies in the state of mortal sin. May God preserve me from this. "Where the tree falls, there shall it lie." May I never offend God grievously.

To die *with* love is what I hope for, with the grace of God. I will never sleep without making sure of the state of my soul, without having made an act of love, and, if necessary, an act of sorrow from the bottom of my heart.

To die *for* love is the privilege of the martyrs. Great souls aspire to this privilege. Foucauld and S Teresa of the Child Jesus longed for it. Will it be mine? Probably not. And yet, who knows? Persecution is a persistent phenomenon in the history of the Church. After all, you would give your life for your country; why not for God?

To die *of* love was the joy of our Lady. Literally, Mary died of love. Her mortal frame could no longer hold the boundless love of God that filled her. Such love could not breathe the air of earth; it needed the air of heaven.

102. KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

"If I had known him," said an old peasant after his conversion, "how I should have loved him." Unlike this old man, I know our Lord;

and yet, do I love him as I ought? Is my worship of Christ worthy of the name of love?

I say that I know him. Do I really know our Lord? Surely if I knew him I would love him otherwise than I do. If my love is so tepid, does it not mean that my knowledge of him is very imperfect.

What is our Lord for me? Is he not what he was for those Apostles to whom he appeared one morning as they were fishing on the banks of the lake, a vague outline in the distance, hardly discernible in the morning-mist? Is Christ a real person for you?

One day the employees in a factory put a crucifix on the table for a joke, to see what the new hand would say when he saw it; for they knew that he was a good Catholic. The newcomer, seeing the crucifix, knew why it had been put there. He smiled, took the crucifix, and, having kissed it, took hammer and a nail, and nailed it to the wall over the table.

Would I have the courage to act in this way? Consider how that young Catholic atoned for the insult offered to Christ by his fellow-workmen.

103. LEARNING TO LOVE CHRIST

“Learn from Christ,” says S Bernard, “how to love Christ.” A saintly woman of the seventeenth century used to say that she could only look upon a crucifix if it was veiled. The vivid representation of Christ’s painful death wrung her heart.

We are used to it. The crucifix means little to us now. The thought that the Word Incarnate died for love of us leaves us unmoved. That we are so cruelly insensible is not due to heartlessness, but rather to want of understanding and reflection. If I only realized it. But it seems so far off!

Then let us come nearer. Let us learn from Christ himself how to love Christ. Hoffman, the painter, depicts our Lady as raising the winding sheet for the last time on the evening of Good Friday, and with a long last look of love gazing upon the divine face of her Child, now cold and rigid in death. Mother, let me also look upon it! The Church on this day uncovers the crucifix, which has been veiled since Passion Sunday. Mary, my Mother, I have so much to learn; hold up the veil for one moment more. I want to learn from Christ himself how to love Christ. *Sic Deus dilexit*. Jesus has loved me to this degree! It is terrible; it seems folly! Yet so it is.

What shall I give my Lord in return? How can I repay such love? By great *love*.

104. CALVARY

“Man is a lyre with seven strings; six for sorrow, one for joy.” It sounds rather pessimistic, but it is often true.

Although this earth, especially for those who know the value of grace, is a vale of joys, yet our nature is subject to so much suffering, moral

and physical, that it is often a vale of tears. Bereavement, failure, ill-health often rend my heart with pain. How shall I endure it?

A postulant before entering Carmel asked: "Is there a crucifix in my cell?" "Yes." "Then I fear nothing." Since my Master has suffered so much, how can I want for courage to undergo trials and difficulties?

Learn resignation from Christ in his agony. "Lord, not my will, but thine be done." Rise even to greater heights, if you can. Perreyre, a great sufferer, said that it is easier in times of trial to say "Magnificat," than merely to say "Fiat." He is right. Suffering will always remain suffering; but the thought of uniting our own cross to the cross of our Saviour transfigures pain to such a degree that in the case of some, who with their suffering have combined an intense interior life, Calvary has been more a Thabor than a Calvary.

Lord, when I suffer, teach me to say: "Thy will be done." Give me the grace even to say: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

105. ON THE BREAST OF JESUS

"If the bitterness of the kiss of Judas was sweetened by the resting of John's breast on thy heart, then, Jesus, let our heads rest for ever on thy breast."* "What hurts me most," said Christ to S Margaret Mary, "is the sin of those who say they are my friends." He had

* Cardinal Maffi, Archbishop of Pisa.

said to Judas: "Friend, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Oh, the bitterness of that traitor's kiss! The very smallest slight or lack of consideration causes me pain. What must that kiss have meant to the tender heart of Jesus! Peter denied him thrice; Judas betrayed him; all his disciples forsook him; John alone stood at the foot of the cross.

Lord, grant that I may take my stand at John's side. May I venture to ask that grace? You can suffer no more; but I know well how you suffered then; I know too that the compassion which I feel now was a solace to you in your agony. Give me the grace to pity you, to make reparation. Allow me to love you for all those who love you not, to adore you for all those who do not adore you, who perhaps insult and reject you.

Yes, my son; that is what my heart desires. But will you be faithful? Can I count on you?

106. DEVOTION TO MARY

"All good works that do not succeed," says Fr. Faber, "fail because they have not enough of Mary in them."

The mayor of a great city, a socialist, wanted the clock-tower of the Labour Exchange to be higher than the rest of the steeples and towers in the city. He forgot that the significance of a steeple is not so much in its rising from the earth, as in its pointing to heaven.

We must infuse spiritual power into our material

efforts, mingle the invisible element with our visible world, a little heaven with our earth. One of the most attractive ways in which we can spiritualize our life on earth, is by devotion to Mary.

A life whose every action is imbued with the thought of our Blessed Lady is transfigured with beauty and solace. In former times the statue of our Lady was to be seen everywhere, over the doors of houses, at the corners of streets, on the ramparts of the city. The wonderful cathedrals of the Middle Ages are a canticle in stone to the glory of Mary. Every hamlet had a shrine, or at least an altar, dedicated to her.

Keep in your heart a special love for Mary, a special thought for her in your mind, a frequent prayer to her on your lips. Two mothers, your mother on earth (if you are so fortunate as to have her still) and your mother in Heaven, are not too many, because there are moments in your life which are difficult not only for your body, but also for your soul. Often recall the words quoted above: "All good works that do not succeed fail because they have not enough of Mary in them."

107. THE POPE

It was said in the year 1903: "The tide has ebbed, and the bark of Peter, abandoned by the sea, has been left high and dry on the sand."

He who said that was a poor prophet, for the Pope is now more powerful than he ever was before. In 1914 fourteen nations were repre-

sented at the Vatican. In 1921 there were twenty-four.

But his moral authority is as nothing compared with his wonderful spiritual authority. For me the occupier of the Vatican is not only the monarch who has the most far-reaching power in the world, he is the Pope, the Holy Father, the Sovereign Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Consider the meaning of these titles.

The *Pope*, Papa; that is, he is our father, our good and loving father. All who have seen Pope Pius XI agree that this is his chief characteristic.

The *Holy Father* : Holy by reason of his holy office, not necessarily holy in himself. But how often in the course of history these two have gone together. All the Popes of the first three centuries, with only two exceptions, were martyrs, and since then there have been many saints among them. Even in our own day, there is talk of the possible beatification of Pope Pius X, the Pope of frequent communion.

The *Sovereign Pontiff* : The first two titles are indicative of goodness; this and the next assert his dignity. The emblem of the pontifical office is the tiara, the triple crown, signifying the triple sovereignty of the Papacy; doctrinal, legislative, and judicial.

The *Vicar of Jesus Christ* : This is the most glorious title of all. "Peter, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may never fail. . . . Feed my sheep. . . . The gates of hell shall not prevail."

Love the Pope, venerate him, pray for him.

108. THE MASS

“ People’s hearts are touched on Good Friday,” says Bossuet, “ because on that day we celebrate the memory of the death of our Saviour. Every day is Good Friday; every day the scene of Calvary is enacted on our altars.” The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross. There is the same priest, Jesus Christ, the same victim, Jesus Christ, with the same attitude of will as on Calvary, that of complete self-oblation for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world. There is only one difference, that of the manner of offering.

Do I really believe this? How did I assist at Mass on the last occasion that I was present? Was I like the child of eight, absent-minded and unintelligent, eager for any distraction to be found in my surroundings? Was I like the man who stands there with his chin resting on the handle of his walking-stick, intent on making a hole in his cane-chair? Really it is heartrending to see the way in which some people assist at Mass.

Our Lord is renewing his sacrifice before my eyes. Here again he has those same dispositions in which he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross. And I stand there dull, sleepy, and indifferent! “ How hard-hearted Christians are!” cries Bossuet. It is not that my heart is really hard. My faith is far away; I do not realize what is happening.

At every Mass let your attitude and dispositions be the same as if you were present at the foot of the Cross.

109. THE EUCHARIST AND CHASTITY

“ Christ under the form of bread and wine mingles his life with our physical life. Do you not see in this the principle of Christian chastity ? Christ is blended with our flesh. There is something of Christ within us, as there is something of our mother.”*

By reason of my baptism I was already bound to be pure. The chief means whereby I may guard this tender virtue in the midst of the difficulties and temptations of my life, protect it from the dust and mud on my path, is to mingle the virgin flesh of Christ with my own sinful flesh, by Holy Communion.

There are some who, when they consider the great demands made upon us by the law of God, forget at the same time to consider the helps which God gives us in order to satisfy those demands. Never separate in your own mind your duty, and the assistance that God gives you to fulfil your duty. Our Master says: “ Be pure.” “ How, my divine Master, shall I be pure, when I am so weak ?” “ I know well, my son, that you are weak ; and I have not hidden it from you. Without me you can do nothing. But have I left you without me ? Do I not give you my flesh and my blood, as often as you wish, every day if you wish, to help you to bear the daily burden ? You complain of your daily task, but you forget the daily bread. Do not separate the one from the other. You can do all things in him that strengthens

* P. Hénusse.

you; unite your weakness to his strength. 'Was not our heart burning within us,' said the disciples of Emmaus, 'whilst he spoke in the way?' Ask me to speak to you in the way; the tabernacle is not far off. Together we will bring about the triumph of chastity."

110. EVERY DAY

Every day, God is insulted, forgotten, disowned, banished, blasphemed.

Every day, the Church is attacked; her independence, her dignity, the honour or the life of her members is in jeopardy.

Every day, Jesus Christ lovingly renews the sacrifice of Calvary upon the altar, whenever a Mass is said in a church or chapel; every day his enemies seek to crucify him again when they curse his Gospel. "It is certain," says Monsignor Gay, "that if Christ were to come again upon the earth, he would immediately be crucified again, and sooner than he was the first time."

Every day, our Lord, in the tabernacle, in the tomb where he remains day and night, whispers to me: "Have I loved you enough? Have I loved you in vain?" Every day he offers me the Host in which he lies hidden.

Every day, thousands of men die. What is an hour? Sixty short minutes. What is a minute? In a minute a hundred men die, a hundred are born; a hundred breathe their last, a hundred utter their first cry. In an hour 6,000 die, 6,000 are born. And for how many of them

will Christ have died in vain ! “ Christ will be in agony until the end of the world.”

Every day, perhaps thousands of souls fall into mortal sin, risk going to hell, and who knows ?—perhaps go there.

And all the time I think only of myself, of my own amusements and distractions, perhaps only of offending God. I am busy with nothing but frivolity, pleasure, emptiness.

My heart is coldly indifferent to all this love, sorrow, hatred, and danger that fill the life of man ; it is absorbed by things that do not deserve a thought.

My mind, with all its capacity for knowledge, is always distracted by trifles.

Try to realize the deep seriousness of human life.

III. A RETREAT

Young men shrink from meditation, for fear of disturbing their lives. It is true that reflection would bring about a change in your life. The only reason why you remain in your present state is that you do not appreciate your life at its true worth.

A long time ago, you decided that you would devote a quarter of an hour every day to meditation. A psychologist has said that if a man reflected on his business affairs for half-an-hour every day, riches would be showered upon him. It is well worth while making the same effort for supernatural riches.

But what is a quarter of an hour ? Would you

not like to devote several successive days to prayer and meditation? There are houses that provide for such retreats. Make one every year.

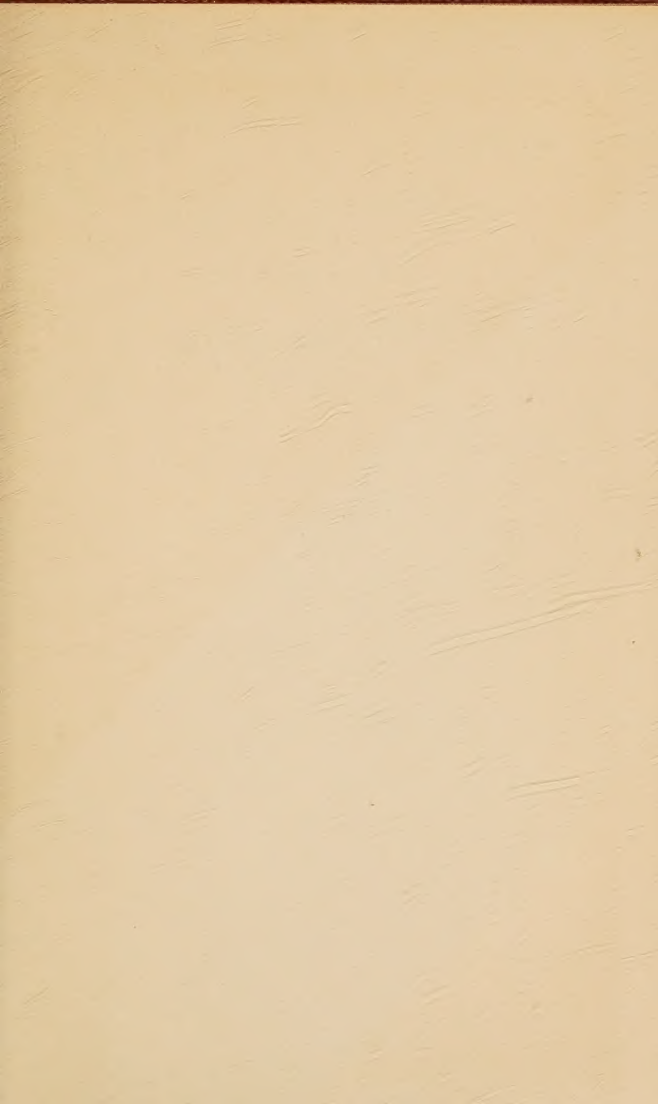
Remember these striking words. "No one, who has not tried it, can possibly appreciate the value of three days passed in meditation far from the noise and bustle of business, and given up entirely to reflection and sincere self-examination. I feel sure that as a means of preparing for one's duties, whether private or public, whether those of statesmen or of private individuals, nothing could be better or more salutary."

CONCLUSION

WE have not intended this to be an exhaustive work. Our object has been merely to present a few suggestive thoughts on themes that are familiar to young men, in order to stimulate personal reflection. Hence the sooner this work ceases to be of use, the sooner shall we have achieved our object.

If these pages have been of any service, then it is to young men that the merit of it is to be ascribed. The author is merely giving back to them what they have given him. He has been in contact with them for many long years, and from that contact he has learned much. The older boys or students with whom he lives, or has lived in the past, have taught him so much that it is only just that he should give back to them something of that acquaintance with their qualities, their aspirations, their difficulties and their dreams, which they have helped him to acquire.

The author is well aware that the words of man, however he may strive to make them carry conviction, are of little avail unless the Master moves and enlightens the heart. He will pray daily, therefore, for all those who read these pages, and seek in them the means of a closer union with God.



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